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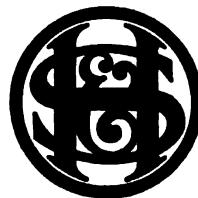


THE LONE ADVENTURE



THE LONE ADVENTURE

BY
HALLIWELL SUTCLIFFE



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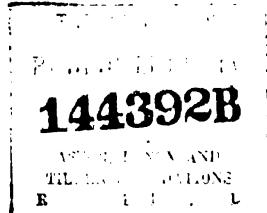
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CHAPTER I

THE FIGHT ON THE MOOR

IN a gorge of the moors, not far away as the crow flies from Pendle Hill, stood a grim, rambling house known to the heath-men as Windyhough. It had been fortified once; but afterwards, in times of ease, successive owners had thought more of dice and hunting than of warfare, and within-doors the house was furnished with a comfort that belied its loop-holed walls.

It stood in the county of Lancaster, famed for its loyalty and for the beauty of its women—two qualities that often run together—and there had been Royds at Windyhough since Norman William first parcelled out the County Palatine among the strong men of his following. The Royd pride had been deep enough, yet chivalrous and warm-hearted, as of men whose history is an open book, not fearing scrutiny but asking it.

The heir of it all—house, and name, and lusty pride—came swinging over the moor-crest that gave him a sight of Windyhough, lying far below in the haze of the November afternoon. It was not Rupert's fault that he was the heir, and less strong of body than others of his race. It was not his fault that Lady Royd, his mother, had despised him from infancy, because he broke the tradition of his house that all its sons must needs be strong and good to look at.

The heir stood on the windy summit, his gun under his arm, and looked over the rolling, never-ending sweep of hills. The sun, big and ruddy, was dipping over Pendle's rounded slope, and all the hollows in between were luminous and still. He forgot his loneliness—for got that he could not sit a horse with ease or pleasure to himself; forgot that he was shy of his equals, shy of the country-folk who met him on the road,

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that his one respite from the burden of the day was to get up into the hills which God had set there for a sanctuary.

Very still, and straight to his full height, this man of five-and-twenty stood watching the pageant of the sun's down-going. It was home and liberty to him, this rough land where all was peat and heather, and the running cry of streams afraid of loneliness, and overhead the snow-clouds thrusting forward from the east across the western splendour of blue, and red, and sapphire.

He shivered suddenly. As of old, his soul was bigger than the strength of his lean body, and he looked down at Windyhough with misgiving, for he was spent with hunger and long walking over the hills he loved. He thought of his father, kind always and tolerant of his heir's infirmities; of his mother, colder than winter on the hills; of Maurice, his younger brother by three years, who could ride well, could show prowess in field-sports, and in all things carry himself like the true heir of Windyhough.

A quick, unreasoning hatred of Maurice took him unawares—Esau's hate for the supplanter. He remembered that Maurice had never known the fears that bodily weakness brings. In nursery days he had been the leader, claiming the toys he coveted; in boyhood he had been the friend and intimate of older men, who laughed at his straightforward fearlessness, and told each other, while the heir stood by and listened, that Maurice was a pup of the old breed.

There was comfort blowing down the wind to Rupert, had he guessed it. The moor loves her own, as human mothers do, and in her winter-time she meant to prove him. He did not guess as much, as he looked down on the huddled chimney-stacks of Windyhough, and saw the grey smoke flying wide above the gables. His heart was there, down yonder where the old house laughed slyly to know that he was heir to it, instead of Maurice. If only he could take his full share in field-sports, and meet his fellows with the frank laugh of comradeship—if he had been less sensitive to ridicule, to the

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self-distrust inbred in him by Lady Royd's disdain—his world might have worn a different face to-day. He stooped to pat the setter that had shared a day's poor sport with him, and then again his thoughts went roving down the years.

He did not hear the sound of hoofs behind him, till Roger Demaine's daughter rode close up, reined in, and sat regarding him with an odd look of pity, and liking, and reproach.

"You look out of heart, Rupert. What ails you?" she asked, startling him out of his day-dream.

"Life. It is life that ails me," he muttered, then laughed as if ashamed of his quick outburst. "I've been tramping the moors since daybreak, Nance," he went on, in a matter-of-fact voice, "and all for three brace of grouse. You know how much powder goes to every bird I kill."

"But, Rupert, why are you so bitter?"

"Because I'm your fool," he broke in, with easy irony. "Oh, they think I do not know! They call me the scholar—or the dreamer—or any other name—but we know what they mean, Nance."

The girl's face was grave and puzzled. Through all the years they had known each other, he and she, he had seldom shown her a glimpse of this passionate rebellion against the world that hemmed him in. And it was true—pitifully true. She had seen men smile good-naturedly when his name was spoken—good-naturedly, because all men liked him in some affectionate, unquestioning way—had heard them ask each other what the Royds had done in times past to deserve such ill-luck as this heir, who was fit only for the cloisters where scholars walked apart and read old tomes.

And yet, for some odd reason, she liked him better for the outburst. Here on his own moors, with the tiredness in his face and the ring of courage in his voice, she saw the manhood in him.

"Rupert," she said, glancing backward, and laughing to hide her stress of feeling. "You've lost me a race to-day."

"Very likely," he said, yielding still to his evil humour. "I

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was always in the way, Nance. My lady mother told me as much, no longer ago than yesterday. This race of yours?" he added, tired of himself, tired of the comrade moor, weary even of Nance Demaine, who was his first love and who would likely, if he died in his bed at ninety, be his last.

She glanced over her shoulder again, and saw two horsemen cantering half a mile away through the crimson sunset-glow. "It was a good wager, Rupert, and you've spoilt it. The hunt was all amiss to-day—whenever we found a fox, we lost him after a mile or two—and Will Underwood and your brother, as we rode home——"

"My brother, and Will Underwood—yes. They hunt in couples always."

"Be patient, Rupert! Your temper is on edge. I've never known it fail you until to-day."

"Fools are not supposed to show temper," he put in dryly. "It is only wise men who're allowed to ride their humours on a loose rein. So you had a wager, Nance?"

"Yes. We had had no real gallop; so, coming home, Maurice said that he would give me a fair start—as far as Intake Farm—and the first home to father's house should——"

She halted, ashamed, somehow, of Rupert's steady glance.

"And the wager?"

She glanced behind her. The two horsemen were climbing Lone Man's Hill, and the sight of them, just showing over the red, sunset top, gave her new courage. "You're brave, Rupert, and I was full of laughter till you spoiled my ride. It was so slight a wager. Maurice has a rough-haired terrier I covet. If—Rupert, you look as if I were a sinner absolute—if I were first home, Maurice was to give me the dog—and, if not——"

"And if not?"

She was dismayed by his cold air of question. "If I lost the wager? Your brother was to have my glove. What harm was there? He's a boy, Rupert—besides," she added,

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with the unheeding coquetry that was constantly leading her astray, "it is you who make me lose the wager. See them, how close they are! And I'd kept my lead so splendidly until you checked me."

He was not heeding her. His eyes were fixed on the upcoming horsemen, and Nance could not understand this new, tense mood of his. It was only when Will Underwood and young Maurice reined up beside them that she knew there was trouble brewing, as surely as snow was coming with the rising wind.

"We've caught you, Nance," laughed Maurice. "Will you settle the wager now, or later?"

He was big and buoyant, this lad of two-and-twenty. Life had used him well, had given him a hale body, and nerves like whipcord, and a good temper that needed little discipline to train it into shape.

Will Underwood laughed. "Best hasten, Maurice, or I'll claim the forfeit for you."

Rupert glanced from Will Underwood to Maurice. There was no hurry in his glance, only a wish to strike, and a temperate, quiet question as to which enemy he should choose. Then, suddenly, the indignities of years gone by came to a head. He recalled the constant yielding to his brother, the gibes he had let pass without retaliation, the long tale of renunciation, weakness.

"Maurice," he said, with a straightening of his shoulders, "I want a word with you. Mr. Underwood, you will ride home with Nance? We shall not need you."

Will Underwood gave a smothered laugh, but Nance was grave. She looked first at Maurice's boyish, puzzled face, then at Rupert.

"I claim your escort, Mr. Underwood," she said sharply.

Some reproof in her tone ruffled Will Underwood and kept him silent as they rode over the crest of the moor and down the long, rough slopes that led them to the pastures. He was assured of his reputation as a hard rider and a man of the

world; and it piqued him to be given marching orders by a boy of five-and-twenty.

"Rupert thought himself his own father just now, Miss Demaine," he said in his deep, pleasant voice. "For the first time since I've known him, he had something of the grand air. What mischief are the two lads getting into up yonder?"

Nance did not know her own mood. She seemed to be free, for the moment, of her light-hearted, healthy girlhood, seemed to be looking, old and wise, into some muddled picture of the days to come. "No mischief," she answered, as if some other than herself were speaking. "Rupert is finding his road to the grand air, as you call it. It is a steep road, I fancy."

Up on the moor Maurice was facing his elder brother. "What fool's play is this, Rupert?" he asked. "Why don't you hunt instead of prowling up and down the moor with a gun till your wits are addled? Your face is like a hatchet."

"You made a wager?" said Rupert, with the same desperate quiet.

"Yes, and I've won it. Come, old monk, admit there are worse gloves to claim in Lancashire."

Rupert winced. His thoughts of Nance Demaine were so long, so fragrant. Since his boyhood struggled first into the riper understanding, he had cloistered her image from the world's rough usage. She had been to him something magical, unattainable, and he was paying now for an homage less healthy than this world's needs demand. It was all so trifling, this happy-go-lucky wager of a dog against a glove; but he saw in it a supplanting more bitter than any that had gone before.

He stood there for a moment, irresolute, bound by old subservience to Maurice, by remembrance of his weakness and his nickname of "the scholar." Then the moor whispered in his ear, told him to be a fool no longer; and a strength that was almost gaiety came to him.

"Get out of the saddle, Maurice," he said peremptorily. "I want to talk to you on foot."

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Maurice obeyed by instinct, as if a ghost had met him in the open and startled him. Here was the scholar—the brother whom he could not any way despise, because he loved him—with a red spot of colour in each cheek, and in his voice the ring of true metal.

“Well?” asked the younger.

“You never would have claimed that glove.”

The boy’s temper, easy-going as it was, was roused.
“Would you have hindered me?”

“Yes. I—I love her. That is all.”

So young Maurice laughed aloud, and Rupert ran in suddenly and hit him on the mouth, and the fight began. In his dreams the heir of Windyough had revelled in battles, in swift assaults, forlorn and desperate hopes; for he had known no waking pleasures of the kind. And always, in his dreams, there had been a certain spaciousness and leisure; he had found time, in between giving and receiving blows, to feel himself the big man of his hands, to revel in the sheer bravery of the thing.

In practice, here on the open moor, with snow coming up across the stormy, steel-grey sky, there was no leisure and no illusion. He had no time to feel, no luxury of sentiment. He knew only that, in some muddled way, he was fighting Nance’s battle; that, by some miracle, he got a sharp blow home at times; that twice Maurice knocked him down; that, by some native stubbornness, he got up again, with the moor dancing in wide circles round him, and hit his man.

It was swift and soon over, as Rupert thought of this battle afterwards. No pipes were playing up and down the hills, to hearten him. Even the wind, whose note he loved, blew swift from the east about deaf ears. He and his brother were alone, in a turmoil of their own making, and his weakening arms were beating like a flail about the head of Maurice, the supplanter. Then the moors whirled round him, a world big with portent and disaster; and dimly, as from a long way off, he heard Maurice’s voice.

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"I'll have to kill him before he gives in. Who ever thought it of the scholar?"

The gibe heartened Rupert. He struggled up again, and by sheer instinct—skill he had little, and strength seemed to have left him long ago—he got another swift blow home. And then darkness settled on him, and he dreamed again of battle as he had known it in the fanciful days of boyhood. He revelled in this lonely moorland fight, counted again each blow and wondered at its strength, knew himself at last a proven man. His dreams were kind to him.

Then he got out from his sickness, little by little, and looked about him, and saw a half-moon shining dimly through a whirl of snow. The east wind was playing shrewdly round his battered face, as if a man were rubbing salt into his wounds. He tried to get up, looked about him again, and saw Maurice stooping over him.

A long glance passed between the brothers, Rupert lying on the heather, Maurice kneeling in the sleety moonlight. There was question in the glance, old affection, some trouble of the jealousy that had bidden them fight just now. Then a little sob, of which he was ashamed, escaped the younger brother.

Rupert struggled to a sitting posture. He could do no more as yet. "So I'm not just the scholar?" he asked feebly.

Maurice, young as he was, was troubled by the vehemence, the wistfulness, of the appeal. Odd chords were stirred, under the rough-and-ready view he had of life. This brother with whom he had fought just now—he understood, in a dim way, the pity and the isolation of his life, understood the daily suffering he had undergone. Then, suddenly and as if to seek relief from too much feeling, the younger brother laughed.

"The next time a man sneers at you for being a scholar, Rupert, give him a straight answer."

"Yes?" The heir of Windyhough was dazed and muddled still, though he had got to his feet again.

"Hit him once between the eyes. A liar seldom asks a second blow, so father says."

Then a silence fell between them, while the last of the sunset red grew pale about the swarthy line of heath above them, and the moon sailed dim and phantom-like through the sleety clouds. They had been fond of each other always, but now some deeper love, some intimate communion, gathered the years up and bound them into lasting friendship. Maurice had been jealous of his brother's heirship, contemptuous of his scholarship. And Rupert had been sick at heart, these years past, knowing how well the supplanter sat his horse, and carried a gun, and did all things reckoned worthy.

And now they met on equal terms. They had fought together, man against man; and their love ripened under the bitter east wind and the stinging sleet, as the man's way is.

They went down the moor together, Maurice leading his horse by the bridle. They were no heroic figures, the three of them. The horse was shivering, after long waiting in the cold while his master settled private differences; and the two brothers limped and stumbled as they picked their way down the white slope of the moor. There was no speed of action now; there was, instead, this slow march home that in its very forlornness touched some subtle note of humour. Yet Rupert was warm, as if he sat by a peat-fire; for he felt a man's soul stirring in him.

"What did we fight about?" asked Maurice suddenly. "The fun was so hot while it lasted—and, gad, Rupert, I've forgotten what the quarrel was."

Again the elder brother grew quick, alert. It seemed he was ready to provoke a second fight. "It was Nance's glove," he said quietly. "You said you meant to claim it, and I said not. I say it still."

"There, there, old lad!" laughed Maurice, patting him lightly on the shoulder. "You shall have the glove. She'd rather give it to you than to any man in Lancashire. I said as much to Will Underwood just now, and he didn't relish it."

"Rather give it me?" echoed the other, with entire simplicity. "I can do nothing that a woman asks, Maurice,"

A sudden dizziness crossed his eagerness. He could not keep the path, until Maurice steadied him.

"You can hit devilish hard," said the younger dryly.

The three of them went down the moor, counting the furlongs miles. And again the brothers met on equal terms; for each was bruised and hungry, and body-sickness, if it strike deep enough, is apt to bring wayfarers to one common level.

Nance and Will Underwood had reached the lower lands by now, and she turned to him at the gate of Demaine House with some reluctance.

"You will let my father thank you for your escort?" she asked, stroking her mare's neck.

"I'll come in," he answered, with the rollicking assurance that endeared him to the hard riders of the county—"if only for an hour more with you." He leaned across and touched her bridle-hand. "Nance, you've treated me all amiss these last days. You never give me a word apart, and there's so much—"

"I'm tired and cold," she broke in, wayward and sleety as this moorland that had cradled her. "You may spare me—what shall I say?—the flattery that Mr. Underwood gives every woman, when other women are not there to hear."

She did not know what ailed her. Until an hour ago she had been yielding, little by little, to the suit which Will Underwood had pressed on her—in season and out, as his way was. There had been sudden withdrawals, gusts of coquetry, on her part; for the woman's flight at all times is like a snipe's—zig-zag, and only to be reckoned with according to the rule of contraries.

But now, as she went into the house, not asking but simply permitting him to follow her, there was a real avoidance of him. She could not rid herself of the picture of Rupert, standing desolate up yonder on the empty moors—Rupert, who was heir to traditions of hard riding and hard fighting; Rupert, with the eyes of a dreamer and the behaviour of a hermit. She wondered what he and Maurice were doing on

the moor. His last words had not suggested need of her—had hinted plainly that he had a man's work to do.

Her father was in the hall as they came in. A glance at his face told her that Roger Demaine was in no mood for trifles, and she stood apart, willingly enough, while he gravely offered wine to Underwood, and filled his glass for him, and scarcely paused to let him set lips to it before he ran into the middle of his tale.

"There's muddled news from Scotland. I can't make head or tail of it," he said, glancing sharply round to see that no servants were in earshot. "We expected him to come south with the New Year, and I've had word just now that he'll be riding through Lancashire before the month is out—that he means to keep Christmas in high state in London."

"I'll not believe it," said Will Underwood lazily. "The clans up yonder need more than a week or two to rally to the muster."

"You were always slow to believe," snapped the Squire. "Have a care, Will, or they'll say you're like nine men out of ten—loyal only until the test comes."

The other glanced at Nance, then at his host. "I would not permit the insult from a younger man, sir," he said.

"Oh, fiddle-de-dee!" broke in old Roger. "Fine phrases don't win battles, and never did. Insult? None intended, Will. But I'm sick with anxiety, and you younger men are the devil and all when you're asked to ride on some one else's errand than your own."

Roger Demaine, big of height and girth, his face a fine, fox-hunter's red, stood palpably for the old race of squires. In his life there were mistakes enough—mistakes of impulse and of an uncurbed temper—but there was no pandering to shame of any sort.

"When I'm asked, sir, I shall answer," said Will Underwood, moving restlessly from foot to foot.

"Well, I hope so. You'll not plead, eh, that you are pledged to hunt six days a week, and cannot come? that you've a snug

house and some thought of bringing a wife to it one day, and cannot come? that you are training a dog to the gun, and cannot come——”

It was Nance who broke in now. She had forgotten Rupert, standing hungry and forlorn up the high moor and looking down on his inheritance of Windyhough. Her old liking for Will Underwood—a liking that had come near, during these last days, to love and hero-worship—bade her defend their guest against a tongue that was sharper than her father guessed.

“I *know* he will be true. Why should you doubt him, father?”

“Oh, there, child! Who said I doubted him? It’s the whole younger race of men I distrust. Will here must be scapegoat—and, by that token, your glass is empty, Will.”

With entire disregard of anything that had gone before, Squire Demaine filled another measure for his guest, pointed to the chair across the hearth, and was about to give the news from Scotland, word by word, when he remembered Nance. “It will be only recruiting-talk, Nance—men to be counted on in one place, and men we doubt in t’other. It would only weary you.”

Nance came and stood between them, slim and passionate. “I choose to stay, father. Your talk of men, of arms hidden in the hay-mows and the byres, of the marching-out—that is your part of the battle. But what afterwards?”

They glanced at her in some perplexity. She was so resolute, yet so remote, in her eager beauty, from the highways that men tramp when civil war is going forward.

“What afterwards?” grumbled Squire Roger. “Well, the right King on the throne again, we hope. What else, my girl?”

“After you’ve gone, father, and left the house to its women? I’m mistress here, since—since mother died.”

Roger Demaine got to his feet hurriedly and took a pinch of snuff. “Oh, have a care, Nance!” he protested noisily.

"There's no need to remind me that your mother died. I should have taken a whole heart to the Rising, instead of half o' one, if she'd been alive."

Nance touched his hair lightly, in quick repentance of the hurt she had given him. But she would not yield her point. "I shall be left mistress here—mistress of a house made up of women and old men—and you? You will be out in the open, giving blows instead of nursing patience by the hearth."

"Perhaps—Nance, perhaps the Rising will not need us, after all," said Will Underwood, with a lame attempt to shirk the issue.

"I trust that it will need you, sir—will need us both," she said, flinging round on him with the speed of her father's temper. "You thought I complained of the loneliness that is coming? No—but, if I'm to take part in your war, I'll know what news you have."

Roger Demaine patted her gently on the shoulder, and smiled as if he watched a kitten playing antics with a serious face. "The child is right, Will," he said. "It will be long and lonely for her, come to think of it, and there's no harm in telling her the news."

"Who was the messenger, father?" she asked, leaning against the mantel and looking down into the blazing log-fire.

"Oh, Oliphant of Muirhouse, from the Annan country. The best horseman north of the Solway, they say. He was only here for as long as his message lasted, and off again for Sir Jasper's at Windyhough."

"And his news?" asked Will Underwood, watching the fireglow play about Nance's clear-cut face and maidish figure.

The Squire drew them close to him, and glanced about him again and, for all his would-be secrecy, his voice rang like a trumpet-call before he had half told them of the doings up in Scotland. For his loyalty was sane and vastly simple.

They were silent for a while, until Nance turned slowly and stood looking at the two men. "It is all like a dream come true. The hunger and the ache, father—the King in name

reigning it here, and that other over-seas—and grooms riding while their masters walk——”

“We’ll soon be up in saddle again,” broke in old Roger brusquely. “Oliphant of Muirhouse brings us news that will end all that. The country disaffected, the old loyalty waiting for a breeze to stir it—how can we fail? I tell you there’s to be another Restoration, and all the church bells ringing.”

He halted, glancing at Will Underwood, who was pacing up and down the room.

“You’ve the look of a trapped wild-cat, Will,” he said irascibly. “I fancied my news would please you—but, dear God, you younger men are cold! You can follow your fox over hedge and dyke and take all risks. It’s only when the big hunt is up that you begin to count the value of your necks.”

Underwood turned sharply. Some trouble of his own had stood between him and the Rising news, but the Squire’s gibe had touched him now. “The big hunt has been up many times, sir,” he said impatiently. “We’ve heard the Stuart shouting Tally-ho all down from Solway to the Thames—but we’ve never seen the fox. Oliphant is too sanguine always.”

Old Roger cut him short. “Oliphant, by grace o’ God; is like a bit of Ferrara’s steel. I wish we had more like him. In my young days we did not talk, and talk—we got to saddle when such as Oliphant of Muirhouse came to rouse us. You’re cold, I tell you, Will. Your voice rings sleety.”

Will Underwood glanced slowly from his host to Nance. He saw that she was watching him, and caught fire from her silent, half-disdainful question. Hot words—of loyalty and daring—ran out unbidden. And Nance, in turn, warmed to his mood; for it was so she had watched him take his fences on hunting-days, so that he had half persuaded her to love him outright and have done with it.

But old Roger was still unconvinced. “We may be called out within the month. Have you set your house in order, Will?”

Again the younger man seemed to be looking backward to

some trouble that had dwarfed his impulse. "Why, no, sir," he answered lamely. "Surely I have had no time?"

"Just so," put in the other dryly. "At my time of life, Will, men learn to set things in order before the call comes. Best have all in readiness."

A troubled silence followed. They stood in the thick of peril soon to come, and Squire Roger, haphazard and unthinking at usual times, had struck a note of faith that was deep, far sounding, not to be denied. As if ashamed of his feeling, openly expressed, the Squire laughed clumsily.

"I was boasting, Nance," he said, putting a rough hand on her shoulder, "and that's more dangerous than hunting foxes—bagged foxes brought over-seas from Hanover. Bless me! you were talking of staying here as mistress, and I'll not allow it. I've had a plan in my head since Oliphant first brought the news."

"But, father, I must stay here. Where else?"

"At Windyhough. No, girl, I'll have no arguments about it. You'll be protected there."

Will Underwood laughed, and somehow Nance liked him none the better for it. "Sir Jasper will go with us, and Maurice, and every able-bodied man about the place—who will be left to play guardian to Nance?"

"Rupert, unless I've misjudged the lad," snapped the Squire.

"He cannot protect himself, sir."

"No. May be not—just yet. But I've faith in that lad, somehow. He'll look after other folk's cattle better than his own. Some few are made in that mould, Will. It's a good mould, and rare."

His secret trouble, and his jealousy of any man who threatened to come close to Nance, swept Will Underwood's prudence clean away. He should have known by now this bluff, uncompromising tone of the Squire's. "She's safer here, sir," he blundered on. "We all know Rupert for a scholar—I'd rather trust Nance to her own women-servants."

"But I would not," put in old Roger dryly, "and I happen

to have a say in the matter. If Rupert's a fool—well, he shall have his chance of proving it. Nance, you go to Windyhough. That's understood? The house down yonder can stand a siege, and this cannot. My fool of a grandfather—God rest him, all the same!—dismantled the house here. He thought there'd never again be civil war in Lancashire—but down at Windyhough they lived in hope."

Nance laughed—the brave laugh of a woman cradled in a house of gallant faith, of loyalty to old tradition. She understood her father's breezy, offhand talk of civil war, as if it were a pleasant matter. He would have chosen other means, she knew, if peace had shown the road; but better war, of friend against friend, than this corroding apathy that had fallen on men's ideals since the King-in-name ruled England by the help of foreign mercenaries.

Will Underwood caught infection from these two. The one was hale, bluff and hard-riding, a man proven; the other was a slip of a lassie, slender as a reed and fanciful; yet each had the same eager outlook on this matter of the Rising—an outlook that admitted no compromise, no asking whether the time were ripe for sacrifice and peril. The moment was instinct with drama to Underwood, and he was ready always to step into the forefront of a scene.

"When are we needed, sir?" he asked, with a grave simplicity that was equal to their own.

"Within the month, if all goes well with the march. There's little time, Will, and much to do."

"Ay, there's much to do—but we shall light a fire for every loyalist to warm his hands at. May the Prince come soon, say I."

The Squire glanced sharply at him. Will's tone, his easy, gallant bearing, removed some doubts he had had of late touching the younger man's fidelity; and when, a little later, Nance said that she would leave them to their wine, he permitted Will to open the door for her, to follow her for a moment into the draughty hall. He noticed, with an old man's dry and

charitable humour, that Nance dropped her kerchief as she went out, and that Will picked it up.

"The hunt is up," he muttered. "The finest hunt is up that England ever saw—and these two are playing a child's game of drop-kerchief. There'll be time to make love by and by, surely, when peace comes in again."

The Squire was restless. To his view of the Prince's march from Scotland, there was England's happiness at stake. He would have to wait three weeks or so, drilling his men, rousing his neighbours to the rally, doing fifty things a day to keep his patience decently in bounds. He needed the gallop south, and the quick dangers of the road; and here, instead, were two youngsters who fancied love was all.

Outside in the hall Nance and Will Underwood were facing each other with a certain grave disquiet. The wind was rising fast; its song overhead among the chimney-stacks was wild and comfortless; the draught of it crept down the stairs, and under the main door, and through ill-fitting casements, blowing the candle-flames aslant and shaping the droppings into what the country-folk called "candle-corpsies." Somewhere from the kitchen a maid-servant was singing a doleful ballad, dear to rustic Lancashire, of one Sir Harry of Devilsbridge, who rode out to his wedding one day and never was seen again save as a ghost that haunted Lang Rigg Moss.

"There's a lively tune for Rising men to march to," said Underwood, ill at ease somehow, yet forcing a gay laugh. "If I were superstitious——"

"We are all superstitious," broke in the other, restless as her father. "Since babyhood we've listened to that note i' the wind. Oh, it sobs, and will not any way be still! It comes homeless from the moors, and cries to us to let it in. Martha is right to be singing yonder of souls crying over the Moss."

Again Will Underwood yielded to place and circumstance. He had watched Nance grow up from lanky girlhood into a

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womanhood that, if it had no extravagance of beauty, arrested every man's attention and made him better for the pause. He had hunted with her, in fair weather and in foul, had sat at meat with her in this house that kept open, hospitable doors. Yet, until to-night, he had not seen her as she was, a child of the moors, passionate, wayward, strong for the realities of human pity, human need for faith and constancy.

"I have your kerchief, Nance," he said. The gravity, the quietness of his tone surprised her. "I'll keep it, by your leave."

She glanced at him, and there was trouble in her eyes. This news of the Rising had stirred every half-forgotten longing, inbred in her, that a Stuart might reign again, gallant and debonair and kingly, over this big-little land of England. She wished the old days back, with desperate eagerness—the days when men were not blameless, as in a fairy-tale, but when, at any rate, they served their King for loyalty instead of prudence. Yet, now, with Will Underwood here, her hopes of the Rising grew shadowy and far-away. She was not thinking of England or the Stuart; she was asking herself, with piteous appeal for help, whether her own little life was to be marred or made by this big, loose-built man whom all women were supposed to love at sight. She drew her skirts away from such intemperate, unstable love; but she had known Will Underwood long, had dreamed of him o' nights, had shaped him to some decent likeness of a hero.

"No, you'll not keep it. You will give it back to me. Oh, I insist!" she broke off, again with her father's quick, heedless need to be obeyed.

He put the kerchief into her hand. "So you're sending me a beggar to the wars," he said sullenly.

"If you go to the wars"—she was looking wistfully at him, as if asking for some better answer to her need of faith—"you shall take it with you, Mr. Underwood."

"You doubt me, Nance?"

"Doubt? I doubt everything these days: you, and the

Prince's march from Scotland, and all—why, all I'm too tired to hope for. You do not guess how tired I am. Tomorrow, may be, the wind will be quieter—and Martha will not be singing from the kitchens how Sir Harry rode over Devilsbridge and came back, without his body, to haunt the moors. Good-night, Mr. Underwood. Go talk with father of the Rising."

Yet still they lingered for a moment. Through all her weariness—through the vague distrust that was chilling her—she remembered the day-time intimacy, the nights of long, girlish dreams, that had gone to the making of her regard for Will. It was untrue—it must be untrue—that he was half-hearted in this enterprise that was to set England free of the intolerable yoke. If Will's honour went by the board, she would begin to doubt her own good faith.

What was passing in Will Underwood's mind he himself scarcely knew, perhaps. He was full of trouble, indecision; but he glanced at Nance, saw the frank question and appeal in her face, and his doubts slipped by him.

"I shall claim that kerchief, Nance," he said—"before the month is out, if Oliphant brought a true message south."

Nance glanced at him. "Mr. Oliphant never lies. His enemies admit as much. So come for what I'll give—if you come before the month is out."

She was gone before he could insist on one last word, and Will Underwood turned impatiently to seek his host. A half-hour later, after she had heard him get to saddle and ride away, Nance came downstairs, and found her father pacing up and down the dining-chamber.

"What, you?" growled old Roger. "I thought you were in bed by this time, child."

"I cannot sleep." She came to his side, and put a friendly arm through his. "Father, am I right? It seems there are so many—so many of our men who are cold——"

"Why, damme, that's just what I was thinking," roared the Squire, his good-humour returning when another shared

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his loneliness. "It's the older men who are warm—the older men who are going to carry this business through. It was not so in my young days. Our fathers licked us into better shape, and we'd fewer luxuries, may be. Why, child, we dared not play fast and loose with loyalty, as some of these young blades are doing."

"They ask for reasons, father. Young Hunter of Hunterscliff rode up to me to-day, as we were waiting for hounds to strike the scent. And I spoke of the Rising, because I can think of little else these days; and he yawned, in the lackadaisical way he brought from London a year ago, and said the Prince was following a wild-goose chase. And he, too, asked for reasons—asked why he should give up a hunting life for the pleasure of putting his neck into a halter."

Roger Demaine stood, square and big, with his back to the fire. His fine apparel, the ordered comfort of the room, could not disguise his ruggedness. He was an out-of-doors man, simple, passionate, clean as the winds and an open life could make him. "Hunter of Hunterscliff will put his neck into a worse halter if he airs such shallow stuff. I'd have had him ducked in the nearest horse-pond if he'd said that to me."

The two looked quietly at each other, father and daughter, each knowing that there was need of some deeper confidence.

"You dropped your kerchief just now, Nance," said Roger dryly, "and Will Underwood picked it up. Did he keep it?"

The girl was full of trouble. Her father's happiness, the welfare of the English land which she loved almost to idolatry, her trust in Underwood's honour, were all at stake. But she stood proud and self-reliant. "Did you train me to drop my kerchief for any man to keep? I tell you, sir—as I told Mr. Underwood just now—that he may claim it when—when he has proved himself."

The Squire was in complete good-humour now. This girl of his was as a woman should be, suave and bendable as a

hazel-twigs, yet strong, not to be broken by any onset of the wind. He could afford to tease her, now that his mind was easy.

"Why, surely Will has proved himself," he said, smiling down at her from his big height. "He can take his fences with any man. He can take his liquor, too, when need asks, and watch weaker men slide gently under-table. He can hit four birds out of five, Nance, and is a proper lady's man as well. Dear heart! what more does the child ask from a lover?"

"I ask so little of him—just to ride out, and ride in again after the bells are ringing a Stuart home. To risk a little hardship. To come out of his hunting and his pretty parlour ways, and face the open. What else does any woman claim from any man, when—oh, when the need is urgent? Father, it was you who taught me what this Rising means—it is Faith, and decency, and happiness for England, fighting against a rabble brought over-seas from Germany, because they cannot trust the English army. It is—the breath of our English gardens that's at stake, and yet such as this Hunters-cliff lad can yawn about it."

"Will Underwood yawns, you mean," snapped the Squire. "It was Underwood you were thinking of. I share your doubts, Nance. He is this and that, and a few men speaking well of him—but there's a flaw in him somewhere. I never could set a finger on it, but the flaw is there."

She turned on him, with hot inconsequence. "He is not proved as yet. I said no more than that. You never liked him, father. You—you are unjust."

"Well, no; I never liked him. But I'm content to wait. If I've misjudged him, I'll admit it frankly. Does it go so very deep, child, this liking for Wild Will?" he broke off, with rough, anxious tenderness. "I'm clumsy with women—I always was—and you've no mother to go to in search of a good, healthy cry."

"Why should it go deep?" she asked, with a pride that would not yield as yet.

"Oh, I've watched you both. The ways of a man and a maid—bless me, they are old as the hills. Of course, he's good to look at, and there's naught against him, so far as I know; but——"

"You will let him prove himself. His chance will not be long in coming, father."

She bade him good-night gravely, yet with a shy, impulsive tenderness, and went up to her own room. The moon was staring in through the low, broad window-space. A keen frost was setting fingers on the glass already; she brushed away the delicate tracery and stood watching the silent, empty lands without. No sleet was falling now. She could see each line of wall that climbed, dead-black by contrast, up the white slope of the pastures. Beyond and high above, a steel-blue sky marked, ridge by ridge, the rough, uncompromising outline of the moor.

It was a scene desolate beyond belief, and would have chilled one foreign to the country; but Nance looked up the wintry slopes as if she found a haven there. There was no illusion attaching to this riding-out of the war-men from Lancashire. She was not swayed by any casual glamour of the pipes, any kilted pageantry of warfare. Her father had taught her, patiently enough, that the Stuarts, though they chanced to capture the liking of most decent women, were intent on graver business. Not once, in the years that had gone before this call to arms, had he trained her to an ideal lower than his own. The Stuart, to his belief, stood for charity, for sacrifice, for unbending loyalty to the Faith once delivered. And such outlook, as he had told her plainly, made neither for pageantry nor sloth.

Nance, watching the sleety wilderness outside, hearing the yelp of the wind as it sprang from the bitter, eastern bank of cloud, recalled her father's teaching with a new, sudden understanding. This sleety land, with its black field-walls climbing to the windy moor above, was eloquent in its appeal to her. There was storm and disaster now—but there was

heather-time to come, and bees among the ling, and the clear, high sunshine over all. Old Squire Demaine, with all his rough-and-ready faults, had taught her faith.

She forgot her trouble touching Will Underwood. The rough, moonlit moor reminded her, in some odd way, of Rupert—of the scholar who a little while ago, up yonder, had taken some fancied quarrel of her own upon his slim shoulders. Somewhere, hidden by the easy pity of the years, was a faith in this scholar who caused misgiving to his friends. She remembered that her father—the last man in Lancashire to be tolerant of a fool—would listen to no gibes at Rupert's expense, that he had bidden her, soon as the hunt was up in earnest, seek refuge at Windyhough.

These white, rough uplands did not bring Will Underwood back to mind at all. They brought only the picture of a lean, wind-driven dreamer, who had tramped the moors all day for the pleasure of sharing his own thoughts with the wilderness. She recalled the look in his face when she had surprised him—the tired question in it, as if he were asking why circumstances had piled up so many odds against him; then the welcome, idolatrous almost in its completeness, that his eyes had given her when he realised that she was near, and after that the curt request that Will Underwood should ride with her, while he settled some difference with his brother.

A woman likes to be worshipped, likes a man to show fight on her behalf; and Nance, watching the stark, moonlit fields, for the first time felt a touch of something more than pity for the heir of Windyhough.

CHAPTER II

THE NIGHT-RIDER

Down at Windyhough, where the old house thrust its gables up into the shelter of its firs and leafless sycamores, Sir Jasper Royd sat listening to the messenger who had ridden from Squire Roger's. Lady Royd, who kept her beauty still at five-and-forty, and with it some air of girlish petulance and wilfulness, sat on the other side of the hearth. Oliphant of Muirhouse stood between them, after supping hastily, with the air of a man who cannot sit unless the saddle carries him.

"We owe you a great debt for bringing in the news," Sir Jasper was saying.

"I am not so sure of that, sir," put in Lady Royd, with sharpness and a hint of coquetry. "You are robbing me of a husband."

"Nay, surely," said Oliphant, with a touch of his quick humour. "The Prince will restore him to you by and by. We're all for Restoration these days, Lady Royd."

"Oh, I know! And you've passed your wine over the water before you set lips to it. I know your jargon, Mr. Oliphant—but it is lives of men you are playing with." A stronger note sounded in her spoiled, lazy voice; she glanced at her husband, asking him to understand her passion.

"Not playing with," said the messenger, breaking an uneasy pause. "Lives of men were given them to use."

"Yes, by gad!" broke in Sir Jasper unexpectedly. "I'm sixty, Mr. Oliphant, and the Prince needs me, and I feel a lad again. I've been fox-hunting here, and shooting, and what not, just to keep the rust out of my old bones in case I was needed by and by—but I was spoiling all the while for this news you bring."

"What are the chances, Mr. Oliphant?" asked Lady Royd, with odd, impulsive eagerness. "For my part, I see a county of easy-going gentlemen and bacon-eating clowns, who wouldn't miss one dinner for the Cause. The Cause? A few lean Highlanders; a lad who happens to carry the name of Stuart; the bagpipes waking our hills in protest with their screeching—righteous protest, surely—I see no hope in this affair."

Oliphant was striding up and down the room. He halted, faced this petted woman of the world; and she wondered how it came that a man so muddied and so lined with weariness could smile as if he came down to breakfast after a night of pleasant sleep.

"The chances? All in our favour, Lady Royd. We're few, and hold the Faith. We never count the chances; we just march on from day to day." His smile grew broader. "And, by your leave, you'll not speak ill of the pipes. They're food and drink to us, when other rations fall a little short. The pipes? You've never heard them, surely."

"Yes, to my cost," put in the other shrewishly. "They're like—like an east wind singing out of tune, I think."

So then Oliphant grew hot on the sudden, as Highlanders will when they defend a thing that is marrow of their bones. "The pipes? You'll hear them rightly, I hope, before you die. The soft, clear tongue of them! They'll drone to ye, soft as summer, Lady Royd, and bring the slopes o' Lomond to your sight—and you'll hear the bees all busy in the thyme; and then they'll snarl at you, and stretch your body tight as whipcord—and then you taste the fight that's brewing up—"

"True," said Lady Royd; "but you ask me for my husband, and I'm loth to part with him. Not all the pipes in Scotland may comfort me after—after this fight that you say is brewing up."

Sir Jasper glanced at her. He had followed her whimsies with great chivalry and patience for six-and-twenty years, because it happened that he loved her, once for all; but he had

not heard, till now, this answering care for his safety, this foolish and tempestuous wish to keep him by her side.

Oliphant of Muirhouse understood their mood. He had ridden through the lonely places, counting life cheap; and such men grow quick of intuition. "Your husband?" he echoed. "I only claim his promises. He'll return to you, after paying pleasant debts."

"Ah! but will he return?"

The messenger was surprised again into open confession of his faith. "One way or another you will meet—yes. The good God sees to that," he answered gravely. "And now, Sir Jasper, we've talked enough, and my bed lies ten miles farther on. Your roads are quagmires—the only bad things I've found yet in Lancashire."

"But, Oliphant, you'll stay the night here? I'll call you at daybreak if needs must."

"I'll sleep—a little later, friend—and at your house another day."

His smile was easy as he bade farewell to Lady Royd and gripped his host's hand for a moment; but Sir Jasper saw him stumble a little as he made towards the door.

"How far have you ridden to-day?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, fifty miles, no more—with a change of horses. Why d'ye ask?" said Oliphant, turning in some surprise.

"Because you look underfed and over-ridden, man. Stay here the night, I say. The Prince himself would not ask more of you if he could see you now."

"The Prince least of all, perhaps. It is his way to shift burdens on to his own shoulders—if we would let him."

Lady Royd found a moment's respite from her spoiled and stunted outlook, from the sense of foreboding and of coming loss—loss of the husband whom, in some queer way, she loved. She looked at Oliphant of Muirhouse, standing in the doorway and looking backward at them; and she wondered by what gift he could be sleepless and saddle-sore, serene and temperately gay, all at the one time.

"Mr. Oliphant," she said, "this lad with the Stuart name gets more than his deserts. He has few men like yourself among his following, surely?"

"He has many better men." Oliphant, weary of everything except the need to get his ten-mile errand done and snatch the sleep he needed, bowed prettily enough to his hostess. "The Prince, God bless him, sets the keynote for us all. He makes weaklings into—something better, Lady Royd."

Royd's wife, she knew not why, thought suddenly of Rupert, her elder-born, and she yielded to the temper that had not been curbed throughout her married life. "Then would God my son could come under the Prince's discipline! He's the heir to Windyhough—laugh with me, Mr. Oliphant, while I tell you what a weakling he is. He can ride, after a fashion—but not to hounds; he can only read old books in the library, or take his gun up to these evil moors my husband loves."

Sir Jasper's temper was slow to catch fire, but it was burning now with a fierce, dismaying heat. He would have spoken—words that would never be forgotten afterwards between his wife and him—if Oliphant had not surprised them both by the quietness of his interruption.

"He has had no chance to prove himself, I take it?" he broke in, with a certain tender gravity. "I was in that plight once—and the chance came—and it seemed easy to accept it. Good-night to you, Lady Royd, and trust your son a little more."

Sir Jasper was glad to follow his guest out of doors into the courtyard, where a grey-blue moon was looking down on the late-fallen sleet. Oliphant's horse, tied to the bridle-ring at the door, was shivering in the wind, and his master patted him with the instinctive, friendly comradeship he had for all dumb things.

"Only ten more miles, old lad," he muttered, hunting for sugar in the pockets of his riding-coat, and finding two small pieces.

As he was untying the bridle a sound of feet came up the roadway. The courtyard gate was opened, and three figures, unheroic all of them, came trudging in. They crossed the yard slowly, and they were strangely silent.

Sir Jasper and his guest stared at the three in blank surprise as they drew near. The moonlight showed them Maurice, carrying a black eye and a battered face with the jauntiness inborn in him, and Rupert, bending a little under the bruises that were patent enough, and a horse that moved dejectedly.

"You've been hunting with a vengeance, boys," said Sir Jasper, after long scrutiny of the sons who stood shame-facedly at attention. "Who was it marked your face so prettily, Maurice?"

"It was Rupert, sir. We had a quarrel—and he half-killed me—I couldn't make him yield."

Sir Jasper was aware of an unreasoning happiness, a sense that, in the thick of coming dangers, he had found something for which he had been searching many years. If he had been Squire Demaine, his intimate friend and neighbour, he would have clapped Rupert on the back, would have bidden his sons drown their quarrel in a bumper. But he was more scholarly, less hale of body than Roger Demaine, and he tasted this new joy as if he feared to lose its flavour. He had fought Rupert's cause so long, had defended him against the mother who despised and flouted him. Under all disappointment had been the abiding faith that his heir would one day prove himself. And now—here was Rupert, bruised and abashed, and Maurice, proud of this troublesome brother who had fought and would not yield.

It was all so workaday, so slight a matter; but Sir Jasper warmed to these two lads as if they had returned from capturing a city for the rightful King. They were bone of his bone, and they had fought together, and Rupert had forgotten that he was born a weakling.

Oliphant of Muirhouse looked on. He remembered both

lads well, for he had halted often at Windyhough during these last troubled years, had seen the heir grow into reedy and neglected manhood, the younger brother claiming notice and regard from every one, by reason of his ready wit, his cheeriness, his skill at sports of all kinds. From the first Oliphant's sympathy had been with the elder-born, with the scholar at whom men laughed; for he could never quite forget his own past days. He looked on to-night, glad of this touch of human comedy that came to lighten his desolate rides between one post of danger and the next.

"Come, lads," said Sir Jasper, with gruff kindness, "you were fools to seek a quarrel. Brother should love brother"—he laughed suddenly, a boy's laugh that disdains maxims—"but there's no harm in a fight, just now and then. What was your quarrel, eh?"

They glanced at each other; but it was Rupert who first broke the silence, not Maurice as in bygone days. "We cannot tell you, sir," he said, with a dignity in odd contrast with his swollen, red-raw face. "Indeed, we cannot."

Sir Jasper, out here in the sleety wind, was not aware of cold or the coming hardships. His heir was showing firmness, and he tempted him into some further show of courage.

"Nonsense, boy! You tell me all your secrets."

Rupert lifted his battered face. "Not this one, sir—and if Maurice tells it—"

"There, there! Get indoors, lads, and ask the housekeeper for a raw beefsteak."

Maurice went obediently enough, knowing this tone of his father's. But Rupert halted on the moonlit threshold, turned in his odd, determined way, and came to Oliphant's side. The messenger, standing with an arm through the bridle of his restive horse, was embarrassed by the look in the boy's eyes—the eager glance of youth when it meets its hero face to face.

"Who is your guest, father?" asked Rupert, as a child asks a question, needing to be answered quickly. "He has often

come to Windyhough, but always in haste. You would never tell me what his name was."

"Mr. Oliphant of Muirhouse. Who else?" Sir Jasper answered, surprised by this sudden question. And then he glanced at Oliphant, ashamed of his indiscretion. "The boy will keep your secret," he added hurriedly.

"I've no doubt at all of that, sir," said the messenger.

So then Rupert said little, because it seemed this meeting was too good to hope for in a world that had not used him very well. He had heard talk of Oliphant, while his father sat beside the hearth o' nights and praised his loyalty. From the grooms, too, he had heard praise of the horsemanship of this night-rider, who was here to-day and gone to-morrow, following the Stuart's business. And, because he had leisure for many dreams, he had made of Oliphant a hero of more immaculate fibre than is possible in a world of give-and-take.

"Is father jesting?" asked the boy. "You are"—the catch in his voice, the battered face he lifted to the moonlight, were instinct with that comedy which lies very close to tears—"you are Oliphant of Muirhouse? Why, sir, I think the Prince himself could—could ask no more from me—if only I were able."

His voice broke outright. And the two elders, somewhere from the haunted lands of their own boyhood, heard the clear music that had been jarred, these many years, by din of the world's making.

"I'm Oliphant of Muirhouse," said the messenger gruffly, "and that's not much to boast of. Is there any service I can render you?"

Rupert, astonished that this man should be so simple and accessible, blurted out the one consuming desire he had in life. "I ride so clumsily: teach me to sit a horse, sir, and gallop on the Prince's business—to be like other men."

Oliphant reached out and grasped his hand. "That will be simple enough one day," he said cheerily. "Sir Jasper, your son is staunch. We'll need him by and by."

Yet Oliphant, after he had said good-bye and ridden out into

the white and naked country, was feeling as tired and unheroic as any man in Lancashire. The wind was pitiless, the roads evil, half between thaw and a gaining frost. Sleep was a constant menace to him, for he had had little during the past week. He was saddle-sore, and every bone of a body not too robust at best seemed aching with desire for rest. Moreover, this land of hills, and hills beyond, riding desolate to the grey sky and the shrouded moon, was comfortless as any step-mother. He knew that his faith, his loyalty, were sound; but no inspiration reached him from these tired and stubborn friends; he was in that mood—it comes equally to those who have done too ill or too well in life—when he was ready to exchange all chances of the future for an hour of rest. He knew that a good horse was under him, that his hands were sure on the reins whenever a sudden hill or a slippery turning met him by the way; for the rest, he was chilled and lifeless.

The last two miles of his journey asked too much of his strength. He swayed in the saddle, and thought that he must yield to this sickness that was creeping over him. Then quietly from the gaunt and sleety hills, Rupert's voice came whispering at his ear. He recalled the lad's bruised face, the passionate idolatry he had shown when he knew that Oliphant of Muirhouse was the guest at Windyhough.

"By gad! the boy would think me a fool if I gave in now," he muttered. "And the message—it *must* go forward."

He rode with new heart for the house where his errand lay. He got indoors, and gave his message. Then he looked round, and saw a couch that was drawn up near the hearth, and for four-and-twenty hours they could not rouse him from the sleep that had carried him back to Rupert's land o' dreams.

Rupert himself, meanwhile, had stood for a while with his father in the courtyard. The sleet and the east wind could not interrupt the warm friendship that held between them.

"What is the news, father?" he asked, breaking the silence.

"Good news enough, lad. The Prince has left Edinburgh on his march south—there has been a ball at Holyrood, all in

the old way, and they say that only churls were absent. His route lies through Lancashire. At long last, Rupert, we're needed, we men of Lancashire."

"We shall not fail," said Rupert buoyantly. "How could we, sir? The preparation—the loyalty waiting only for its chance—I forgot, sir," he finished, with sudden, weary impotence. "I'm not one of you. I got all this from books, as mother said to me last night. She was wrong, for all that—I learned it at your knee."

They stood looking at each other, father and son, seeking help in this bleak wilderness of sleet. They were comrades; yet now there seemed a deep gulf fixed between them, between the strength and pity of the one, the weakness of the other.

"I taught you no lies, at any rate," said Sir Jasper gruffly. "Let's go indoors and set your face to rights."

"But, father, I shall ride with you?"

"No, no," said the other, with brusque tenderness. "You are not—not strong enough—you are untrained to stand the hardships of a campaign."

Rupert's face grew white and set, as he understood the full meaning of that word "untrained." In the peaceful days it had been well enough for him to stand apart, possessed by the belief that he was weaker than his fellows; it was a matter of his own suffering only; but now every loyal man in Lancashire was needed by the Prince. His father's hesitancy, the wish to save him pain, were very clear to him. He had thought, in some haphazard, dreamy way, that zeal and complete readiness to die, if need be, for the Cause, were enough to make a soldier of him. But now he realised that untrained men would be a hindrance to the march, that he would be thwarting, not aiding, the whole enterprise.

"There, you take it hardly, lad!" said Sir Jasper, ill at ease. "Your place is here. You'll be needed to guard Windyhough and the women while we're away."

"You mean it in kindness, sir, but—the fight will sweep south, you tell me."

"It may sweep any way, once the country is astir. You may find yourself fighting against long odds, Rupert, before you've had time to miss us. Come, it is each to his own work these days."

In the hall, as they went in, Lady Royd was making much of Maurice, obviously against his will. His hurts must be seen to—how had he come by them?—he was looking grey and ill—Maurice was ashamed of the twenty foolish questions she put to him.

"Mother, I'm a grown man by now," he was saying as Sir Jasper entered. "The nursery days are over."

"Yes," put in his elder brother, with a quick, heedless laugh, "the nursery days are over, mother."

She turned to him, surprised by his tone and new air of command. And on his face, too, she saw the marks of his stubborn fight with Maurice; and something stirred in her—some instinct foreign to her easy, pampered life—some touch of pride that her elder-born could fight like other men.

"So it was you who fought with Maurice? Miracles do not come singly, so they say." From sheer habit she could not keep back the gibe. "We shall have the skies raining heroes soon if the heir of Windyhough——"

"Be quiet, wife!" broke in Sir Jasper hotly. "Your sons—God help me that I have to say it!—your sons will be ashamed of you in years to come."

Sir Jasper had been bitter once about his heir's weakness. He had met and conquered that trouble long ago, as straight-riding men do, and had found a great love for Rupert, a chivalrous and sheltering love that, by its very pity, broadened the father's outlook upon all men. Year by year, as he saw that pride meant more than motherhood, the rift had grown wider between husband and wife, though he had disguised it from her; and this sudden, imperative fury of his had been bred by many yesterdays.

Lady Royd stepped back, as if he had struck her, and a strange quiet fell on all of them. The wind had shifted, for

the twentieth time to-day, and was crying thinly round the chimney-stacks. A grey, acrid smoke was trailing from the hearth, and hail was beating at the windows. Somewhere, from the stables at the rear, a farm dog was howling dismally.

Lady Royd shivered as she drew the lace more closely round her neck. She was helpless against this storm that had gathered out of doors and in. With an understanding too keen for her liking, she realised what this Rising was doing to her men-folk. The breath of it was abroad, stormy and swift. It had made her husband restless, forgetful of the lover's homage that he had given until these last months; it had made Rupert leave his books and dreams, from sheer desire of lustiness; it had made Sir Jasper, here in the smoky hall, with the thin wind blowing through it, say words of which already, if his face were aught to go by, he repented.

It was Rupert that broke up a silence that dismayed more practical folk. It had been his way to bear no malice; and now, glancing at Lady Royd, he was aware that she needed help. He came to her side—diffidently enough, as if he feared repulse—and put a hand on her shoulder.

"She was right, sir," he said, as if defending her against his father. "I'd not had pluck to fight until to-day. I—I was not what the heir should be."

Sir Jasper saw that tears were in his wife's eyes, saw that she was over-wrought and tired. "Get to bed, my lads," he said, with a friendly laugh—"and keep the peace, or I'll lay a heavy hand on the pair of you."

When they were alone he turned to his wife. The wind's note was louder, the hail beat hard and quick about the windows, the farm dog was howling ceaselessly.

"I was harsh just now," he said.

"No." Her face was older, yet more comely. "It was I who was harsh. Rupert needed me all these years, and I would not heed—and he was generous just now—and I'm thinking of the years I've wasted."

Her repentance—yet awhile, at any rate—would be short-lived; for winter is never a sudden and lasting convert to the warmth of spring. Yet her grief was so patent, her voice so broken and so tender, that Sir Jasper, in his simple way, was thankful he was leaving Rupert, since leave him he must, to better cheer than he had hoped for.

"He'll find his way one day," he said. "Be kind to him, wife—it's ill work for a man, I tell you, to be sitting at home while other men are fighting. I'll not answer for his temper." Then suddenly he smiled. He's a game pup, after all. To see Maurice's face when they came home together—and to know that it was Rupert who had knocked it so pleasantly out of shape——"

"Is there nothing pleases men but war?" the wife broke in piteously. "Nothing but blows, and bruised faces——"

"Nothing else in the world, dear heart—when war happens to be the day's business. Peace is well enough, after a man has earned it honestly."

Lady Royd was tired, beaten about by this cold, northern winter that had never tamed her love of ease. "Then women have no place up here," she said fretfully. "Bloodshed—how we loathe it and all your needless quarrels! And all the while we ask ourselves what does it matter which king is on the throne, so long as our husbands are content to stay at home? Women surely have no place up here."

Sir Jasper, too, was tired in his own way. "Yes, you've a place," he answered sharply—"the place we fight to give you. There's only one King, wife—I'm pledged to his service, by your leave."

"Oh, yes," she said, with her pleasant drawl. "I know that by heart. Faith, and the high adventure, and the King. There's only one matter you forget—the wife who sits at home, and plies her needle, and fancies each stitch is a wound her husband takes. You never saw that dark side of your Rising?"

"Wounds?" said the other gruffly. "We hide them, wife

—that is men's business. The fruits of them we bring home
—for our wives to spend."

"Ah, you're bitter," she pleaded.

"Not bitter," he said. "I'm a man who knows his world—or thinks he does. The men earn—and the women spend; and you never guess how hard come by is that delicate gift, honour, we bring you."

"Honour?" She was peevish now. "I know that word, too, by heart. It brings grief to women. It takes their men afield when they have all they need at home. It brings swords from the scabbard——"

"It brings peace of soul, after the wounds are healed," Sir Jasper interrupted gravely.

Will Underwood about this time had reached his own house, and had found his bailiff waiting for him. He had added another wing to the house in the summer, and workmen had been busy ever since in getting things to rights indoors in readiness for the ball which Underwood had planned for Christmas Eve—a ball that should outmatch in lavishness and pomp all previous revels of the kind.

"Well, Eli?" growled the master, who was in no good mood to-night. "Your face is sour enough. Have you waited up to tell me that the men are discontented again with their wages?"

"Nay, with their King," said the bailiff, blunt and dispassionate. "It's a pity, for we were getting gradely forrad with the work—and you wanted all done by Kirstmas, so you said. I'd not go up street myself to see any king that stepped. Poorish folk and kings are much o' the same clay, I reckon. Sexton at th' end of all just drops 'em into six feet o' wintry mould."

Will Underwood's father had held the like barren gospel, expressed in terms more guarded. Perhaps some family instinct, at variance with the coat he wore these days, had prompted Will, at his father's death, to keep as bailiff one of the few "levellers" who were to be found in this loyal corner

of the north. If so, he should have stood by his choice; but instead he yielded to childish and unreasoning passion.

"D'ye think I'm missing my bed at this time o' night to hear your ranting politics? It would be a poor king that couldn't prick your windbag for you, Eli. Stick to your ledgers and the workmen—"

"It's them I'm trying to stick to," broke in Eli, with that impassive dead-weight of disbelief which is like a buckler to some men. "The workmen are all gone daft about some slip o' Belial they call Stuart Charlie. Squire Demaine has been among and about them, talking of some moonshine about a Rising; and Sir Jasper Royd has been among 'em; and, what with one and t' other, the men are gone daft, I tell you. They talk in daylight o' what they dursen't whisper to the dark a few months since; they're off to the wars, they reckon, and you can whistle, maister, for your carpenters and painters."

Underwood fidgeted up and down the room, and Eli watched him furtively. The bailiff, apart from his negative creed that every man was probably a little worse than his neighbour, and princes blacker than the rest, was singularly alive to his own interests. He had a comfortable billet here, and was aware of many odd, unsuspected channels by which he could squeeze money from the workmen busy with the new wing of the house; it did not suit his interests that the master should ride out to lose his head in company with Sir Jasper and Squire Demaine.

"Stick to the chap that's sitting on a throne, maister. That's my advice," he said, gauging the other's irresolution to a nicety. "Weights are heavy to lift, especially when they've been there for a long while."

Will Underwood found his better self for a moment. He remembered the way of Sir Jasper, the look on Nance's face as she bade him ask for her kerchief when he was ready to go out on a loyal errand. A distaste of Eli seized him; there was no single line of the man's squat body, no note of his voice, that did not jar on him.

THE LONE ADVENTURE

"Your tongue's like a file, Eli," he snapped. "You forget that I'm a King's man, too—a Stuart man."

"Nay, not so much o' one," broke in the other dryly, taking full advantage of an old servant's tyranny. "Your father was weaned on thirst and brimstone, maister; and he was reared, he was, on good, hot Gospeller's stuff, such as they used to preach at Rigstones Chapel; and he never lost the habit when he gat up i' the world. Nay, there's naught Stuart about ye."

Will Underwood, standing with a foot in either camp, was accused not so much by Eli's blunt, unlovely harshness as by his own judgment of himself. He knew, now that he was compelled to ask questions of himself, that all his instincts, tap them deeply enough, were against monarchy of any sort—against monarchy of soul over body, against the God these Catholic gentry worshipped, against restraints of all kinds. He saw Rigstones Chapel, standing harsh against the moor—the home of a lonely, obscure sect unknown beyond its own borders, a sect that had the east wind's bitterness for creed, but no remembrance of the summer's charity. He remembered, as a little chap, going to service at his father's side, recalling the thunder and denunciation from the pulpit, the scared dreams that had shared his bed with him when afterwards he went to sleep on Sabbath nights.

Underwood got himself in hand again. Those days were far off, surely. Despite Eli's unbelieving face, confronting him, he was striving to forget that he had ever shared those moorland walks to Rigstones Chapel. His father had learned gradually that it was absurd to credit a score of people, assembled in a wayside chapel, with the certainty that, out of the world's millions, they alone were saved; and afterwards this same father had bought a fine house, because the squire who owned it had gambled credit and all else away. And the son had found a gift for riding horses, had learned from women's faces that they liked the look of him; and, from small and crude beginnings, he had grown to be Wild Will, the

hunter who never shirked his fences, the gay lover who had gathered about himself a certain fugitive romance that had not been tested yet in full daylight.

Eli watched his master's face. The hour was late. The wind was shrill and busy here, as it was at Windywhole. The world of the open moor, with its tempests and its down-rightness, intruded into this snug house of Underwood. Will was shut off from his intimates, from the easy, heedless life, that had grown to be second nature to him. He was aware of a great loneliness, a solitude that his bailiff's company seemed, not to lessen, but to deepen. In some odd way he was standing face to face with the realities of this Stuart love that had been a pastime to him, a becoming coat to wear when he dined or hunted with his friends. There was no pastime now about the matter. He thought of Sir Jasper Royd, of Squire Demaine, of others he could name who were ready to go out into the wilderness because the time for words was over and the time for deeds had come.

"You're not just pleased, like, with all this moonshine about the lad wi' yellow hair," said Eli guardedly. "Now, there, maister! I allus said ye had your grandfather's stark common sense."

Will Underwood did not heed him. He began to pace up and down the floor with the fury that Squire Demaine, not long ago, had likened to that of a wild cat caught in a trap. It was so plain to him, in this moment of enlightenment, how great a price these friends of his were ready to pay without murmur or question of reward. They had schooled themselves to discipline; they were trained soldiers, in fact, ready for blows or sacrifice, whichever chanced; their passing of the loyal toast across the water had been a comely, vital ritual, following each day's simple prayer for restoration of the Stuart Monarchy.

And he? Will listened to the gale that hammered at the window, saw Eli's inquisitive, hard face, fancied himself pacing again the moorland road that led to Rigstones Chapel and its

gospel of negation. His frippery was stripped from him. He felt himself a liar among honest men. He could find no sneer to aim at the high, romantic daring of these folk who were about to follow a Prince they had not seen; for he knew that he was utterly untrained to such sacrifice as was asked of him. To give up this house of his, the pleasant meetings at the hunt or by the covert-side; to put his neck on the block, most likely, for the sake of a most unbusinesslike transaction—it was all so remote from the play-actor's comedy in which he had been a prime figure all these years. He had not dreamed that Prince Charles Edward, in sober earnest, would ever bring an army into pleasant England to disturb its peace.

Eli watched the irresolution in his face. He, at least, was business-like. He had none of the spirit that takes men out on the forlorn hope, and he measured each moment of his life as a chance for immediate and successful barter.

"Maister," he said quietly, "you've not heard, may be, the rumour that's going up and down the country-side?"

"Bad news?" snapped Underwood. "You were always ready to pass on that sort of rumour."

"Well, I call it good news. They say Marshal Wade has men enough under him to kill half Lancashire—and he's marching down this way from Newcastle to cut off these pesty Scotchmen."

Will Underwood turned sharply. "Is your news sure, Eli?"

"Sure as judgment. I had it from one of Wade's own riders, who's been busy hereabouts these last days, trying to keep silly country-folk from leaving their homes for sake o' moonshine. He laughed at this pretty-boy Prince, I tell ye, saying he was no more than a lad who tries to rob an orchard with the big farmer looking on."

Underwood questioned him in detail about this messenger of Marshal Wade's, and from the bailiff's answers, knowing

the man's shrewdness, he grew sure that the odds were ludicrously against the Prince.

"I'm pledged to the Stuart Cause. You may go, Eli," he said, with the curtness he mistook for strength.

"Ay, you're pledged, maister. But is it down in black and white? As a plain man o' business, I tell ye no contract need be kept unless it's signed and sealed."

"And honour, you old fool?" snapped Underwood, afraid of his own conscience.

"Honour? That's for gentry-folk to play with. You and me, maister, were reared at Rigstones Chapel, where there was no slippery talk o' that kind. It's each for his own hand, to rive his way through to the Mercy Throne. It's a matter o' business, surely—we just creep and clamber up, knowing we've to die one day—and we've to keep sharp wits about us, if we're to best our neighbour at the job. It would be a poor do, I reckon, if ye lost your chance by letting some other body squeeze past ye, and get in just as th' Gates were shutting, leaving ye behind."

The whole bleak past returned to Will Underwood. He saw, as if it stood before him harsh against the rough hillocks of the moor, the squat face of Rigstones Chapel. He heard again the gospel of self-help, crude, arid, and unwashed, that had thundered about his boyhood's ears when his father took him to the desolation that was known as Sabbath to the sect that worshipped there. It had been all self-help there, in this world's business or the next—all a talk of gain and barter—and never, by any chance, a hint of the over-glory that counts sacrifice a pleasant matter, leading to the starry heights.

"Eli, I washed my hands of all that years ago," he said.

"Ay, and, later on try to wash 'em of burning brimstone, maister—it sticks, and it burns, does the hell-fire you used to know."

There is something in a man deeper than his own schooling of himself—a something stubborn, not to be denied, that springs from the graves where his forefathers lie. To-night,

as he watched Eli's grim mouth, the clean-shaven upper lip standing out above his stubby beard, as he listened to his talk of brimstone, he was no longer Underwood, debonair and glib of tongue.. He was among his own people again—so much among them that he seemed now, not only to see Rigstones Chapel, but to be living the old life once more, in the little house, near the watermill that had earned the beginnings of his grandfather's riches. Thought by thought, impulse by impulse, he was divided from these folk of later years—the men and women who hunted, dined, and danced, with the single purpose behind it all—the single hope that one day they would be privileged to give up all, on the instant call, for loyalty to the King who reigned in fact, if not in name. To-night, with Eli's ledger-like, hard face before him, Underwood yielded to the narrower and more barren teaching that had done duty for faith's discipline at Rigstones Chapel. And yet he would not admit as much.

"You're a sly old sinner, Eli," he said, with a make-believe of the large, rollicking air which he affected.

The bailiff, glancing at his master's face, knew that he had prevailed. "Ay, just thereby," he said, his face inscrutable and hard. "But one way or another, I mean to keep free o' brimstone i' the next world. It's all a matter o' business, and I tell ye so."

Underwood went out into the frosty, moonlit night, and paced up and down the house-front. His forebears had given him one cleanly gift, at least—he needed always, when in the thick of trouble, to get away from house-walls, out into the open. The night was clear, between one storm and the next, and the seven lamps of Charlie's Wain swung high above his head. He had to make his choice, once for all, and knew it—the choice between the gospel of self-help and the wider creed that sends men out to a simple, catholic sacrifice of houseroom and good living.

He looked at the matter from every side, businesslike as his father before him. There were many pledges he had given

that he would join his intimates when the summons came. If they returned from setting a Stuart on the throne, the place he had won among them would be valueless. But, on the other hand, Eli's news made it sure that they would not return, that, if they kept whole skins at all, they would be driven into exile overseas. He knew, too, that there were many lukewarm men, prudent doubters, even among the gentry here whose every instinct had been trained to the Stuart's service. The few hot-headed folk—the dreamers—were riding out to disaster certain and foreknown—but there would be practical, cool men enough left here in Lancashire to keep him company.

And there was Nance. He was on ground less sure now. It lay deeper than he guessed, deeper than his love of hunting and good-living, his passion for Nance Demaine. She was at once his good and evil angel, and to-night he had to choose his road. All that was best in his regard for her pointed to the strict, narrow road of honour. And she had promised him her kerchief when he returned from following that road. And yet—to lose life and lands, may be—at best, to be a fugitive in foreign countries—would that help him nearer to the wooing? If he stayed here, she would be derelict at Windyhough, would need his help. He could ride down to the house each day, be at hand to tempt her with the little flatteries that mean much when women are left in a house empty of all men-folk. And, if danger came up the moors after the Rising was crushed at birth by Marshal Wade, he would be at hand to protect her.

To protect her. He knew, down under all subterfuge, that such as Nance find the surest protection when their men are riding straight, and he was not riding straight to-night; and finer impulses were stirring in him than he had felt through five-and-thirty years of self-indulgence.

He glanced at the moors, saw again the squat, practical face of Rigstones Chapel, heard Eli Fletcher's east-wind, calculating voice. He was true to his breed to-night, as he surrendered to the bleak, unlovely past.

"Fools must gang their gait," he muttered, "but wise men stay at home."

Eli Fletcher was crossing the hall as he went in, and glanced at the master's face. "Shall we get forrard wi' the building?" he asked, needing no answer.

"Ay, Eli. And we'll dance at Christmas, after this ill-guided Rising is ended."

"You're your father over again," said Eli, with grim approval.

CHAPTER III

THE HURRIED DAYS

UNEASY days had come to Lancashire. The men had grown used to security, save for the risk of a broken neck on hunting-days, their wives pampered and extravagant; for peace, of the unhealthy sort, saps half their vigour from men and women both. They had nothing to fear, it seemed. There had been wars overseas, and others threatened; but their battles had been fought for them by foreign mercenaries of King George's. For the rest, Lancashire hunted and dined and diced, secure in the beauty of her women, the strength of her men who rode to hounds and made love in the sleepy intervals.

And now the trumpet-call had sounded. None spoke abroad of the news that Oliphant of Muirhouse and other messengers were bringing constantly; but, when doors were closed, there was eager talk of what was in the doing. And the elders of the company were aware that, for every man who held loyalty fast in his two hands, there were five at least who were guarded in devotion, five who spoke with their lips, but whose hearts were set on safety and the longing to enjoy more hunting days.

It was this lukewarmness that harassed and exasperated men like Sir Jasper and Squire Demaine. Better open enemies, they felt—those who were frankly ranged against the Old Faith, the Old Monarchy, the old traditions—than easy-going friends who would talk but would not act. Here on the windy heights of Lancashire they were learning already what the stalwarts farther north were feeling—an intolerable sickness, an impatience of those who wished for the return of the old order, but had not faith enough to strike a blow for it.

Yet there were others; and day by day, as news of the Prince's march drifted down to Windyhough, Sir Jasper was heartened to find that after all, he would bring a decent company to join the Rising. Meanwhile, the lives they were living day by day seemed odd to thinking men who, like Sir Jasper, understood how imminent was civil war, and what the horrors of it were. The farmers rode to market, sold their sheep and cattle, returned sober or otherwise according to force of habit, just as at usual times. In the village bordering Windyhough the smith worked at his bellows, the cobbler was busy as ever with making boots and scandal, the labourers' wives—the shiftless sort—scolded their husbands into the alehouse, while the more prudent ones made cheery hearths for them at home. It seemed incredible that before the year was out there would be such a fire kindled in this peaceful corner of the world as might burn homesteads down, and leave children fatherless, if things went amiss with Prince Charles Edward.

But Sir Jasper let no doubts stay long with him. Things would go well. If the risks were great, so was the recompense. A Stuart safely on the throne again; English gentlemen filling high places where foreigners were now in favour; the English tongue heard frequently at Court; a return of the days when Church and King meant more than an idle toast—surely the prize was worth the hazard.

He carried a sore heart on his own account these days. He had a wife and sons at Windyhough; he loved the house that had grown old in company with his race; he had no personal gain in this adventure of the Prince's, no need of recompense nor wish for it; and sometimes, when he was tired-out or when he had found the younger gentry irresolute in face of the instant call to arms, he grew weak and foolish, as if he needed to learn from the everlasting hills about him that he was human after all. And at these times his faith shone low and smoky, like a fire that needs a keen breath of wind to kindle it afresh.

On one of these days, near dusk, as he rode home across the moor, dispirited because no news had followed Oliphant's message of a week ago, a rider overtook him at a spurring gallop, checked suddenly, and turned in saddle.

"I was for Windyhough," he panted. "You've saved me three miles, sir—and, gad! my horse will bless you."

"The news, Oliphant? The news? I'm wearying for it."

"Be ready within the week. The Prince is into Annan—Carlisle will fall—get your men and arms together. Pass on the word to Squire Demaine."

"And the signal?"

"Wait till I bring it, or another. Be ready, and—God save the King!"

Here on the hill-tops, while Oliphant of Muirhouse breathed his horse for a moment, the two men looked, as honest folk do, straight into each other's eyes. Sir Jasper saw that Oliphant was weary in the cause of well-doing; that was his trade in life, and he pursued it diligently; but the older man was not prepared for the sudden break and tenderness in the rider's voice as he broke off to cry "God save the King!" There was no bravado possible up here, where sleetly, austere hills were the only onlookers; the world's applause was far off, and in any case Oliphant was too saddle-sore and hungry to care for such light diet; yet that cry of his—resolute, gay almost—told Sir Jasper that two men, here on the uplands, were sharing the same faith.

"God save the King!" said Sir Jasper, uncovering; "and—Oliphant, you'll take a pinch of snuff with me."

Oliphant laughed—the tired man's laugh that had great pluck behind it—and dusted his nostrils with the air of one who had known courts and gallantry. "They say it guards a man against chills, Sir Jasper—and one needs protection of that sort in Lancashire. Your men are warm and Catholic—but your weather and your roads—de'il take them!"

"Our weather bred us, Oliphant. We'll not complain."

Oliphant of Muirhouse glanced at him. "By gad! you're

tough, sir," he said, with that rare smile of his which folk likened to sun in mid-winter frost.

"By grace o' God, I'm tough; but I never learned your trick of hunting up tired folk along the roads and putting new heart into them. How did you learn the trick, Oliphant?" .

It was cold up here, and the messenger had need to get about his business; but two men, sharing a faith bigger than the hills about them, were occupied with this new intimacy that lay between them, an intimacy that was tried enough to let them speak of what lay nearest to their hearts. Oliphant looked back along the years—saw the weakness of body, the tired distrust of himself that had hindered him, the groping forward to the light that glimmered faint ahead.

"Oh, by misadventure and by sorrow—how else? I'll take another pinch of snuff, Sir Jasper, and ride forward."

"If they but knew, Oliphant!" The older man's glance was no less direct, but it was wistful and shadowed by some doubt that had taken him unawares. "We've all to gain, we loyalists, and George has left us little enough to lose. And yet our men hang back. Cannot they see this Rising as I see it? Prosperity and kingship back again—no need to have a jug of water ready when you drink the loyal toast—the May-pole reared again in this sour, yellow-livered England. Oliphant, we've the old, happy view of things, and yet our gentlemen hang back."

A cloud crossed Oliphant's persistent optimism, too. In experience of men's littleness, their shams and subterfuges when they were asked to put bodily ease aside for sake of battle, he was older than Sir Jasper. The night-riders of this Rising saw the dark side, not only of the hilly roads they crossed, but of human character; and in this corner of Lancashire alone Oliphant knew to a nicety the few who would rise, sanguine at the call of honour, and the many who would add up gain and loss like figures in a tradesman's ledger.

"Sir Jasper," he said, breaking an uneasy silence, "the

Prince will come to his own with few or many. If it were you and I alone, I think we'd still ride out."

He leaned from the saddle, gripped the other's hand, and spurred forward into the grey haze that was creeping up the moor across the ruddy sundown.

Sir Jasper followed him, at an easier pace. For a while he captured something of Oliphant's zeal—a zeal that had not been won lightly—and then again doubt settled on him, cold as the mist that grew thicker and more frosty as he gained the lower lands. He knew that the call had come which could not be disobeyed, and he was sick with longing for the things that had been endeared to him by long-continued peace. There was Rupert, needing a father's guidance, a father's help at every turn, because he was a weakling; he had not known till now how utterly he loved the lad. There was his wife, who was wayward and discontented these days; but he had not forgotten the beauty of his wooing-time. There was all to lose, it seemed, in spite of his brave words not long ago.

Resolute men feel these things no less—nay, more, perhaps—than the easy-going. Their very hatred of weakness, of swerving from the straight, loyal path, reacts on them, and they find temptation doubly strong. Sir Jasper, as he rode down into the nipping frost that hung misty about the chimney-stacks below him, had never seen this house of his so comely, so likeable. Temptation has a knack of rubbing out all harsher lines, of showing a stark, mid-winter landscape as a land of plenty and of summer. There were the well ordered life, the cheery greetings with farmer-folk and hinds who loved their squire. There was his wife—she was young again, as on her bridal-day, asking him if he dared leave her—and there was his heir. Maurice, the younger-born, would go out with the Rising; but Rupert must be left behind.

Sir Jasper winced, as if in bodily pain. Every impulse was bidding him stay. Every tie, of home and lands and tenantry, was pulling him away from strict allegiance to the greater

Cause. He had but to bide at home, to let the Rising sweep by him and leave him safe in his secluded corner of the moors; it was urgent that he should stay, to guard his wife against the licence that might follow civil war; it was his duty to protect his own.

The strength of many yesterdays returned to help Sir Jasper. Because he was turned sixty, a light thinker might have said that he might take his ease; but, because he was turned sixty, he had more yesterdays behind him than younger men—days of striving toward a goal as fixed as the pole-star, nights of doubt and disillusion that had yielded to the dawn of each succeeding sunrise. He had pluck and faith in God behind him; and his trust was keen and bright, like the sword-blade that old Andrew Ferrara had forged in Italy for Prince Charles Edward.

"The Prince needs me," he muttered stubbornly. "That should be praise enough for any man."

He rode down the bridle-track to Windyhough; and the nearer he got to the chimneys that were smoking gustily in the shrewd east wind, the more he loved his homestead. It was as if a man, living in a green oasis, were asked to go out across the desert sands, because a barren, thirsty duty called him.

Again the patient yesterdays rallied to his aid. He shook himself free of doubts, as a dog does when he comes out of cold waters; and he took a pinch of snuff, and laughed. "After all, I was growing fat and sleepy," he thought, stooping to pat the tired horse that carried him. "One can sleep and eat too much."

He found Lady Royd in the hall, waiting for him, and a glance at her face chilled all desire to tell her the good Rising news.

"What is the trouble, wife?" he asked, with sudden foreboding. "Is Rupert ill?"

She stamped her foot, and her face, comely at usual times, was not good to see. "Oh, it is Rupert with you—and always Rupert—till I lose patience. He is—why, just the

scholar. He does not hunt; he scarce dares to ride—we'll have to make a priest of him."

"There are worse callings," broke in Sir Jasper, with the squared jaw that she knew by heart, but would not understand. "If my soul were clean enough for priesthood, I should no way be ashamed."

"Yes, but the lands? Will you not understand that he is the heir—and there must be heirs to follow? We have but two, and you're taking Maurice to this mad rising that can only end on Tower Hill."

"That is as God wills, wife o' mine."

Again she stamped her foot. "You're in league together, you and he."

"We share the same Faith," he put in dryly, "if that is to be in league together."

"Only to-day—an hour before you came—I found him mooning in the library, when he should have been out of doors. 'Best join the priests at once, and have done with it,' said I. And 'No,' he answered stubbornly, 'I've been reading what the Royds did once. They fought for Charles the First, and afterwards—they died gladly, some of them. I come of a soldier-stock, and I need to fight.' The scholar dreamed of soldiery! I tapped him on the cheek—and he a grown man of five-and-twenty—and"—she halted, some hidden instinct shaming her for the moment—"and he only answered that he knew the way of it all—by books—dear heart, by books he knew how strong men go to battle!"

"Rupert said that?" asked Sir Jasper gently. "Gad! I'm proud of him. He'll come to soldiery one day."

"By mooning in the library—by roaming the moors at all hours of the day and night—is that the way men learn to fight?"

Sir Jasper was cool and debonair again. "Men learn to fight as the good God teaches them, my lady. We have no part in that. As for Rupert—I tell you the lad is staunch and leal. He was bred a Christian gentleman, after all, and

breed tells—it tells in the long run, Agnes, though all the fools in Lancashire go making mouths at Rupert."

He strode up and down the hall, with the orderly impatience that she knew. And then he told the Rising news; and she ran towards him, and could not come too close into his arms, and made confession, girlish in its simplicity, that she, who cared little for her son, loved her husband better than her pride.

"You'll not go? It is a mad Rising—here with the Georges safe upon the throne. You need not go, at your age. Let younger men bear the brunt of it, if they've a mind for forlorn hopes."

He put her arms away from him, though it helped and heartened him to know that, in some queer way, she loved him.

"At any age one serves the Prince, wife. I'm bidden—that is all."

Lady Royd glanced keenly at her husband. She had been spoilt and wilful, counting wealth and ease as her goal in life; but she was sobered now. Sir Jasper had said so little; but in his voice, in the look of his strong, well-favoured face, there was something that overrode the shams of this world. He was a simple-minded gentleman, prepared for simple duty; and, because she knew that he was unbreakable, her old wilfulness returned.

"For my sake, stay!" she pleaded. "You are—my dear, you do not know how much you are to me."

He held her at arm's length, looking into her face. Her eyes were pixie-like—radiant, full of sudden lights and fugitive, light-falling tears. So had he seen her, six-and-twenty years before, when he brought her as a bride to Windyhough. For the moment he was unnerved. She was so young in her blandishment, so swift and eager a temptation. It seemed that, by some miracle, they two were lad and lass again, needing each other only, and seeing the world as a vague and sunlit background to their happiness.

"Ah, you'll not go!" she said softly. "I knew you would not."

"Not go?" He stood away from her, crossed to the window that gave him a sight of the last sunset-red above the heath. "You are childish, Agnes," he said sharply.

"So are all women, when—when they care. I need you here—need you—and you will not understand."

Sir Jasper laughed, with a gentleness, a command of himself, that did not date from yesterday. "And a man, when he cares—he cares for his honour first—because it is his wife's. Agnes, you did not hear me, surely. I said that the Prince commands me."

"And I command you. Choose between us."

Her tone was harsh. She had not known how frankly and without stint she loved this man. She was looking ahead, seeing the forlornness of the waiting-time while he was absent on a desperate venture.

He came and patted her cheek, as if she were a baby to be soothed. "I choose both," he said. "Honour and you—dear heart, I cannot disentangle them."

She felt dwarfed by the breadth and simplicity of his appeal. The world thought her devout, a leal daughter of the Church; but she had not caught his gift of seeing each day whole, complete, without fear or favour from the morrow. And, because she was a spoilt child, she could not check her words.

"You've not seen the Prince. He's a name only, while I—I am your wife."

Sir Jasper was tired with the long day's hunting, the news that had met him by the way; but his voice was quiet and resolute. "He is more than a name, child. He's my Prince—and one day, if I live to see it, his father will be crowned in London. And you'll be there, and I shall tell them that it was you, Agnes, who helped me fasten on my sword-belt."

And still she would not heed. Her temperament was of

the kind that afterwards was to render the whole Rising barren. She had no patience and little trust.

"Why should I give you God-speed to Tower Hill?" she snapped. "You think the name of Stuart is one to conjure with. You think all Lancashire will rise, when this wizard Prince brings the Stuart Rose to them. Trust me—I know how Lancashire will wait, and wait; they are cautious first and loyal afterwards."

"Lancashire will rise," broke in Sir Jasper; "but, either way, I go—and all my tenantry."

"And your heir? He will go, too, will he not?"

She did not know how deep her blow struck. He had resisted her, her passionate need of him. He would leave her for a Rising that had no hope of success, because the name of Stuart was magical to him. In her pain and loneliness she struck blindly.

He went to the door, threw it open, and stood looking at the grey, tranquil hills. There was the sharp answer ready on his tongue. He checked it. This was no time to yield to anger; for the Prince's men, if they were to win home to London, had need of courage and restraint.

"My son"—he turned at last, and his voice was low and tired—"our son, Agnes—he is not trained for warfare. I tell you, he'll eat his heart out, waiting here and knowing he cannot strike a blow. His heart is big enough, if only the body of him would give it room."

She was desperate. All the years of selfishness, with Sir Jasper following every whim for love of her, were prompting her to keep him at her apron-strings. Her own persuasion had failed; she would try another way, though it hurt her pride.

"He'll eat his heart out, as you say. Then stay for the boy's sake," she put in hurriedly. "He will feel the shame of being left behind—he will miss you at every turn—it is cruel to leave him fatherless."

She had tempted him in earnest now. He stood moodily

at the door, watching the hills grow dark beneath a sky of velvet grey. He knew the peril of this Rising—knew that the odds were heavy against his safe return—and the pity of that one word “fatherless” came home to him. This weakling of his race had not touched compassion in the mother, as the way of weaklings is; but he had moved his father to extreme and delicate regard for him, had threaded the man’s hardihood and courage with some divine and silver streak.

He turned at last. There was something harsh, repellent in his anger, for already he was fighting against dreary odds.

“Get to your bed, wife! Fatherless? He’d be worse than that if I sat by the fireside after the Prince had bidden me take the open. He’d live to hear men say I was a coward—he’d live to wish the hills would tumble down and hide him, for shame of his own father. God forgive you, Agnes, but you’re possessed of a devil to-night—just to-night, when the wives of other men are fastening sword-belts on.”

It was the stormy prelude to a fast and hurrying week. Messengers rode in, by night and day, with news from Scotland. They rode with hazard; but so did the gentlemen of Lancashire, whenever they went to fair or market, and listened to the rider’s message, and glanced about to see if George’s spies were lingering close to them.

Men took hazards, these days, as unconcernedly as they swallowed breakfast before getting into saddle. Peril was part of the day’s routine, and custom endeared it to them, till love of wife and home grew like a garden-herb, that smells the sweetest when you crush it down.

Lady Royd watched her husband’s face, and saw him grow more full of cheeriness as the week went on. Oliphant’s news had been true enough, it seemed, for Scotland had proved more than loyal, and had risen at the Stuart’s call as a lass comes to her lover. The Highlanders had sunk their quarrels with the Lowlanders, and the ragged begin-

ning of an army was already nearing Carlisle. Then there came a morning when Sir Jasper rode into the nearest town on market-day, and moved innocent and farmer-like among the thick-thewed men who sold their pigs and cattle, and halted now and then to snatch news of the Rising from some passer-by who did not seem, in garb or bearing, to be concerned with Royal business; and he returned to Windyhough with the air of one who has already come into his kingdom.

"They are at Carlisle, wife," he said. "They've taken the Castle there——"

"It's no news to Carlisle Castle, that," she broke in—shrewishly, because she loved him and feared to let him go. "It stands there to be taken, if you've taught me my history—first by the Scots, and the next day by the English. Carlisle is a wanton, by your leave, that welcomes any man's attack."

He had come home to meet east wind and littleness—the spoilt woman's littleness, that measures faith by present and immediate gains. He was chilled for the moment; but the loyalty that had kept him hale and merry through sixty years was anchored safe.

"The Prince comes south, God bless him!" he said gravely. "We shall go out at dawn one of these near days, Agnes. We shall not wait for his coming—we shall ride out to meet him, and give him welcome into loyal Lancashire."

She was not shrewish now. Within the narrow walls she had built about her life she loved him, as a garden-flower loves the sun, not asking more than ease and shelter. And her sun was telling her that he must be absent for awhile, leaving her in the cold, grey twilight that women know when their men ride out to battle.

"You shall not go," she said, between her tears. "Dear, the need I have of you—the need——"

He stooped suddenly and kissed her on the cheek. "I

should love you less, my dear, if I put slippers on at home and feared to take the open."

And still she would not answer him, or look him in the eyes with the strength that husbands covet when they are bent on sacrifice and need a staff to help them on the road.

"You're not the lover that you were—say, more years ago than I remember," she said with a last, soft appeal.

He laughed, and touched her hand as a wooer might. "I love you twice as well, little wife. You've taught me how to die, if need be."

She came through the door of the garden that had sheltered her. For the first time in her life she met the open winds; and Sir Jasper's trust in her was not misplaced.

"Is that the love you've hidden all these years?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear. It's the love you had always at command, if you had known it. Men are shy of talking of such matters."

She ran to get his sword, docile as a child, and laid it on the table. "I shall buckle it on for you, never fear," she said, with the light in her eyes at last—the light he had sought and hungered for.

"Sweetheart, you—you care, then, after all?" He kissed her on the lips this time. "We shall go far together, you and I, in the Prince's cause. Women sit at home, and pray—and their men fight the better for it. My dear, believe me, they fight the better for it."

They faced each other, searching, as wind-driven folk do, for the larger air that cleanses human troubles. And suddenly she understood how secure was the bond that intimacy had tied about them. She had not guessed it till she came from her sheltered garden and faced the breezy hills of Lancashire at last.

And her husband, seeing her resolute, allowed himself a moment's sickness, such as he had felt not long ago after saying goodbye to Oliphant high up the moor. He might

not return. The odds were all against it. He was bidding a last farewell, perhaps, to the ordered life here, the lover's zeal which his wife commanded from him still—to the son whom he had watched from babyhood, waiting always, with a father's dogged hope, for signs of latent strength. In some queer way he thought most of his boy just now; the lad was lonely, and needed him.

Then he crushed the sickness down. The night's road was dark and troublesome; but, whether he returned or no, there must needs be a golden end to it.

"What does it matter, wife?" he said, his voice quivering a little. "A little loneliness—in any case it would not be for long, sweetheart—and then—why, just that the Prince had called me, and we had answered, you and I——"

She swept round on him in a storm of misery and doubt. "Oh, Faith's good enough in time of Peace. Women cherish it when days go easily, and chide their men for slackness. And the call comes—and then, God help us! we cling about your knees while you are resolute. It is the men who have true faith—the faith that matters and that helps them."

He took her face into his two hands. She remembered that he had worn just this look, far off in the days of lavender and rosemary, when he had brought her home a bride to Windyhough and had kissed her loneliness away.

"What's to fear? War or peace—what's to fear? We're not children, wife o' mine."

And "No!" she said, with brave submissiveness. And then again her face clouded with woe, and tenderness, and longing, as when hill-mists gather round the sun. "Ah, but yes!" she added petulantly. "We are like children—like children straying in the dark. You see the Prince taking London, with skirl of the pipes and swinging Highland kilts. *I see you kneeling, husband, with your head upon the block.*"

Sir Jasper laughed quietly, standing to his full, brave height. "And either way it does not matter, wife—so long

as the Prince has need of me. You'll find me kneeling, one way or the other."

From the shadowed hall, with the candles flickering in the sconces, their son came out into the open—their son, who could not go to war because he was untrained. He had been listening to them.

"Father," he said, "I must ride with you. Indeed, I cannot stay at home."

Sir Jasper answered hastily, as men will when they stand in the thick of trouble. "What, you? You cannot, lad. Your place is here, as I told you—to guard your mother and Windyhough."

The lad winced, and turned to seek the shadows again, after one long, searching glance at the other's unrelenting face. And Lady Royd forgot the past. She followed him, brought him back again into the candlelight. One sharp word from the father had bidden her protect this son who was bone of her bone. Rupert looked at her in wonder. She had been his enemy till now; yet suddenly she was his friend.

He looked gravely at her—a man of five-and-twenty, who should have known better than to blurt out the deeper thoughts that in prudent folk lie hidden. "Mother," he said, striving to keep the listless, care-naught air that was his refuge against the day's intrusions—"mother—"

She had not heard the word before—not as it reached her now—because she had not asked for it. It was as if she had lived between four stuffy walls, fearing to go out into the gladness and the pain of motherhood.

"Yes, boy?" she asked, with lover-like impatience for the answer.

"You are kind to—to pity me. But it seems to make it harder," he said with extreme simpleness. "I'm no son to be proud of, mother." His voice was low, uncertain, as he looked from one to the other of these two who had brought him into a troubled world.

Then he glanced shyly at his father. "I could die, sir, for the Prince," he added, with a touch of humour. "But they say I cannot live for him."

The wife looked at the husband. And pain crossed between them like a fire. He was so big of heart, this lad, and yet he was left stranded here in the backwater of life.

Sir Jasper laid a hand on his shoulder. "You're no fool, Rupert," he said, fierce in his desire to protect the lad from his own shame. "I give you the post of honour, after all—to guard your mother. We cannot all ride afield, and I'm leaving some of our men with you."

"Yes," said Rupert; "you leave the lamesters, father—the men who are past service, whose joints are crazy."

He was bitter. This Rising had fired his chivalry, his dreams of high adventure, his race-instinct for a Stuart and the Cause. He had dreamed of it during these last, eager nights, had freed himself from daytime weakness, and had ridden out, a leader, along the road that led through Lancashire to London. And the end of it was this—he was to be left at home, because straight-riding men were hindered by the company of an untrained comrade.

The father saw it all. He had not watched this son of his for naught through five-and-twenty years of hope that he would yet grow strong enough to prove himself the fitting heir. It was late, and Sir Jasper had to make preparation for a ride to market at dawn; but he found time to spare for Rupert's needs.

"Come with me, Rupert," he said, putting an arm through his son's. "It was always in my mind that Windyhough might be besieged, and I leave you here—in command, you understand."

"In command?" Rupert was alert, incredulous. "That was the way my dreams went, father."

"Dreams come true, just time and time. You should count it a privilege, my lad, to stay at home. It is easier to ride out."

Lady Royd, as she watched them go arm-in-arm together through the hall, was in agreement with her husband. It was easier to ride out than to sit at home, as scholars and women did, waiting emptily for news that, when it came, was seldom pleasant. Already, though her husband had not got to saddle, she was counting the hazards that were sure to meet him on the road to London. And yet some sense of comfort whispered at her ear. Her son was left behind to guard her. She lingered on the thought, and with twenty womanish devices she hedged it round, until at last she half believed it. This boy of hers was to guard her. In her heart she knew that the storm of battle would break far away from Windyhough, that in the event of peril Rupert must prove a slender reed; but she was yielding to impulse just now, and felt the need to see her son a hero.

Sir Jasper, meanwhile, was going from room to room of the old house, from one half-forgotten stairway to another. He showed Rupert how each window—old loop-holes, most of them, filled in with glass to fit modern needs—commanded some useful outlook on an enemy attacking Windyhough. He showed him the cellars, where the disused muskets and the cannon lay, and the piles of leaden balls, and the kegs of gunpowder.

"You're in command, remember," he said now and then, as they made their tour of the defences. "You must carry every detail with you. You must be ready."

To Sir Jasper all this was a fairy-tale he told—a clumsy tale enough, but one designed to soften the blow to his heir; to Rupert it was a trumpet-note that roused his sleeping manhood.

"I have it all by heart, father," he said eagerly. Then he glanced sharply at Sir Jasper. "No one ever—ever trusted me till now," he said. "It was trust I needed, maybe."

Sir Jasper was ashamed. Looking at Rupert, with his lean body, the face that was lit with strength and purpose, he repented of the nursery-tale he had told him—the tale of

I tell you. A Royd stands facing trouble always when the pinch comes."

She looked at him wistfully, with a sense that he was years older than herself in steadiness, years younger in his virile grip on faith. It was an hour when danger and the coming separation made frank confession easy. "I share your Faith," she said quietly, "but I'm not devout as you are. Oh, miracles—they happened once, but not to-day. This boy of ours—can you see him holding Windyhough against trained soldiery? Can you hear him sharp with the word of command?"

"Yes," said the other, with the simplicity of trust. "If the need comes, he will be a Royd."

"Dear, you cannot believe it! I, who long to, cannot. No leader ever found his way—suddenly—without preparation—"

"No miracle was ever wrought in that way," he broke in, with the quiet impatience of one who knows the road behind, but not the road ahead. "There are no sudden happenings in this life—and I've trained the lad's soul to leadership. I would God that I'd not lied to him to-night—I would that the siege could come in earnest."

Rupert crept silently away, down the passage, and through the hall, and out into the night. Through all his troubles he had had one strength to lean upon—his father's trust and comradeship. And now that was gone. He had heard Sir Jasper talk of the siege as of a dream-toy thrown to him to play with. In attack along the London road, or in defence at home, he was untrained, and laughable, and useless.

There was war in his blood as he paced up and down the courtyard. His one ally had deserted him, had shown him a tender pity that was worse to bear than ridicule. He stood alone, terribly alone, in a world that had no need of him.

The wind came chill and fretful from the moor, blowing a light drift of sleet before it; and out of the lonely land a sudden hope and strength reached out to him. It was in the

"And yet," she murmured, with remembrance of her son—the son who was the firstfruit of their wooing—"you said that you had lied to Rupert when you bade him guard the house. Why bring in gunpowder, except to load your muskets with?"

He sighed impatiently. This parting from the wife and son grew drearier the closer it approached. "We had other plans in the summer. It was to be a running fight, we thought, from Carlisle down through Lancashire. Every manor was to be held as a halting-place when the Prince's army needed rest."

He crossed to the big western window of the hall, and stood looking up at the moonlit, wintry hills. Then he turned again, not guessing that his son was standing in the shadows close at his right hand.

"Other counsels have prevailed," he said, with the snapishness of a man who sees big deeds awaiting him and doubts his human strength. "I think the Prince did not know, Agnes, how slow we are to move in Lancashire—how quick to strike, once we're sure of the road ahead. Each manor that held out for the King—it would have brought a hundred doubters to the Cause; the army would have felt its way southward, growing like a snowball as it went. They say the Prince overruled his counsellors. God grant that he was right!"

"So there's to be no siege of Windyhough?" asked Lady Royd slowly.

"None that I can see. It is to be a flying charge on London. The fighting will be there, or in the Midlands."

"That is good hearing, so far as anything these days can be called good hearing. Suppose your lie had prospered, husband? Suppose Rupert had had to face a siege in earnest here? Oh, I've been blind, but now I—I understand the shame you would have put on him, when he was asked to hold the house and could not."

"He could!" snapped Sir Jasper. "I've faith in the lad,

CHAPTER IV

THE LOYAL MEET

Two days later Sir Jasper and Maurice sat at breakfast. There was a meet of hounds that morning, and, because the hour was early, Lady Royd was not down to share the meal. It was cold enough after full sunrise, she was wont to say, with her lazy, laughing drawl, and not the most devoted wife could be expected to break her fast by candlelight.

Sir Jasper, for his part, ate with appetite this morning. The unrest of the past weeks had been like a wind from the north to him, sharpening his vigour, driving out the little weaknesses and doubts bred of long inaction. And, as he ate, old Simon Foster, his man-of-all-work, opened the door and put in the grizzled head which reminded his master always of a stiff broom that had lately swept the snow.

"Here's Maister Oliphant," said Simon gruffly. "Must I let him in?"

"Indeed you must," laughed Oliphant, putting him aside and stepping into the room. "My business will not wait, Sir Jasper, though Simon here is all for saying that it crosses you to be disturbed at breakfast-time."

The two men glanced quickly at each other. "You're looking in need of a meal yourself, Oliphant. Sit down, man, and help us with this dish of devilled kidneys."

Oliphant, long ago, had learned to take opportunity as it came; and meals, no less than his chances of passing on the messages entrusted to him, were apt to prove haphazard and to be seized at once. Old Simon, while they ate, hovered up and down the room, eager for the news, until his master dismissed him with a curt "You may leave us, Simon."

Simon obeyed, but he closed the door with needless vio-

lence; and they could hear him clattering noisily down the passage, as if he washed his hands of the whole Rising business.

"*You may leave us, Simon!*" he growled. "That's all Sir Jasper has to say, after I'm worn to skin and bone in serving him. And he must know by this time, surely, that he allus gets into scrapes unless I'm nigh-handy, like, to advise him what to do. Eh, well, maisters is maisters, and poor serving-men is serving-men, and so 'twill be till th' end o' the chapter, I reckon. But I wish I knew what Maister Oliphant rade hither-till to tell Sir Jasper."

Oliphant looked across at his host, after Simon's heavy footfalls told them he was out of earshot. "The hunt comes this way, Sir Jasper, with hounds in full cry. I see you're dressed for the chase."

"And have been since—since I was breeked, I think. When, Oliphant? It seems too good to be true. All Lancashire is asking when, and I'm tired of telling them to bide until they hear Tally-ho go sounding up the moors."

"You start at dawn to-morrow. Ride into Langton, and wait till you see the hounds in full view."

"And the scent—how does it lie, Oliphant?"

"Keen and true, sir. I saw one near the Throne three days ago, and he said that he had never known a blither hunting-time."

They had talked in guarded terms till now—the terms of Jacobite freemasonry; but Sir Jasper's heart grew too full on the sudden for tricks of speech. "God bless him!" he cried, rising to the toast. "There'll be a second Restoration yet."

Maurice, his face recovered from traces of the fight with his stubborn brother, had been abashed a little by Oliphant's coming, for, like Rupert, he had the gift of hero-worship. But now he, too, got to his feet, and his face was full of boyish zeal. "We'll hunt that fox of yours, Mr. Oliphant," he

laughed—"ay, as far as the sea. We'll make him swim—over the water, where our toasts have gone."

"He's bred true to the old stock, Sir Jasper," laughed Oliphant. "I wish every loyalist in Lancashire had sons like Maurice here to bring with him."

Sir Jasper found no answer. An odd sadness crossed his face, showing lines that were graven deeper than Oliphant had guessed. "Come, we shall be late for the meet," he said gruffly. "Oliphant, do you stay and rest yourself here, or will you ride with us? The meet is at Easterfield to-day."

"As far as the cross-roads, then. My way lies into Langton."

Oliphant's tone was curt as his host's, for he was puzzled by this sudden coolness following his praise of Maurice. As they crossed the courtyard to the stables he saw Sir Jasper glance up at the front of the house, and there, at an upper window, Rupert the heir was watching stronger men ride out to hunt the fox. He saw the misery in the lad's face, the stubborn grief in the father's, and a new page was turned for him in that muddled book of life which long night-riding had taught him to handle with tender and extreme care.

At the cross-ways they parted. All had been arranged months since; the proven men in Lancashire, as in other counties, were known to the well-wishers of the Prince. Each had his part allotted to him, and Sir Jasper's was to rally all his hunting intimates. So far as preparation went, this campaign of the Stuart against heavy odds had been well served. The bigger work—the glad and instant wish of every King's man to rally to the call, forgetting ease of body, forgetting wives and children—was in the making, and none knew yet what luck would go with it.

"At Langton to-morrow," said Oliphant, over-shoulder, as he reined about.

"Yes, God willing—and, after Langton, such a fire lit as will warm London with its flames."

When they got to Easterfield, Maurice and his father, the sun was shining on a street of melting snow, following a quick and rainy thaw, on well-groomed men and horses, on hounds eager to be off on the day's business. And, as luck had it, they found a game fox that took them at a tearing gallop, five miles across the wet and heavy pastures, before they met a check.

The check lasted beyond the patience of the hunters, and Sir Jasper chose his moment well.

"Gentlemen," he said, rising in his stirrups—"gentlemen, the meet is at my house of Windyhough to-morrow. Who rides with me?"

The field gathered round him. He was a man commanding men, and he compelled attention.

"What meet?" asked Squire Demaine, his ruddy face brick-red with sudden hope.

"The Loyal Meet. Who's with me, gentlemen?"

Sir Jasper was strung to that pitch of high endeavour which sees each face in a crowd and knows what impulse sways it. They gathered round him to a man; but as he glanced from one to the other he knew that there were many waverers. For loyalty, free and unswerving, sets a light about a man's face that admits no counterfeit.

Yet the din was loud enough to promise that all were of one mind here. Hounds and fox and huntsmen were forgotten. Men waved their hats and shouted frantically. Nance Demaine and the half-dozen ladies who were in the field to-day found little kerchiefs and waved them, too, and were shrill and sanguine in their cries of "The Prince, God bless him!—the Prince!—the Stuart home again!"

It was all like Bedlam, while the austere hills, lined here and there with snow that would not melt, looked down on this warmth of human enterprise. The horses reared and fidgeted, dismayed by the uproar. Hounds got out of hand and ran in and out between the plunging hoofs, while the huntsman, a better fox-hunter than King's man, swore

roundly and at large as he tried to bring them out of this outrageous riot.

"Where's Will Underwood?" asked a youngster suddenly. It was young Hunter of Hunterscliff, whose lukewarmness had angered Nance not long ago. "It's the first meet he's missed this winter."

A horseman at his elbow laughed, the laugh that men understood. "He had business in the south, so he told me when I met him taking the coach. Wild Will, from the look of his face, seemed tired of hunting."

"No!" said Sir Jasper sharply. "I'll have no man condemned without a hearing. He lives wide of here—perhaps this last news of the Rising has not reached him. Any man may be called away on sudden business."

"You're generous, sir. I'm hot for the King, and no other business in the world would tempt me out of Lancashire just now. Besides, he must have known."

Nance had lost her high spirits; but she was glad that some one had spoken on Will Underwood's behalf, for otherwise she must have yielded to the impulse to defend him.

"That does not follow, sir," said Sir Jasper, punctilious in defence of a man he neither liked nor trusted. "At any rate, it is no time for accusation. Mr. Underwood, if I know him, will join us farther south."

Young Hunter, a wayward, unlicked cub, would not keep silence. "Yes," he said, in his thin, high-pitched voice, "he'll join us as far south as London—after he's sure that a Stuart's on the throne again."

An uneasy silence followed. Older men looked at older men, knowing that they shared this boy's easy summing-up of Underwood's motives. And Nance wondered that this man, whom she was near to loving, had no friends here—no friends of the loyal sort who came out into the open and pledged their faith in him.

There was a game hound of the pack—a grey old hound that, like the huntsman, was a keener fox-hunter than loyal-

ist; and, through all this uproar and confusion, through the dismayed silence that followed, he had been nosing up and down the pastures, finding a weak scent here, a false trail there. And now, on the sudden, he lifted his grey head, and his note was like a bugle-call. The younger hounds scampered out from among the hoofs that had been playing dangerously near them and gave full tongue as they swung down the pastures.

Sir Jasper spurred forward. "Here's an omen, friends," he cried. "The hunt is up in earnest. We shall kill, I tell you! we shall kill!"

It was a run that afterwards, when the fires of war died down and all Lancashire was hunting once again in peace, was talked of beside cottage hearths, on market-days when squires and yeomen met for barter—was talked of wherever keen, lusty men foregathered for the day's business and for gossip of the gallant yesterdays.

Sir Jasper led, with Squire Demaine close at his heels. It seemed, indeed, the day of older folk; for away in front of them, where the sterns of eager hounds waved like a frantic sea, it was Pincher—grey, hefty, wise in long experience—that kept the running.

Prince Charles Edward was forgotten, though he had need of these gentlemen on the morrow. After all, with slighter excuse, they might any one of them break their necks to-day in pursuit of the lithe red fox that showed like a running splash of colour far ahead. The day was enough for them, with its rollicking hazards, its sense of sheer pace and well-being.

Down Littlemead Ings the fox led them, and up the hill that bordered Strongstones Coppice. He sought cover in the wood, but Pincher, with a buoyant, eager yell, dislodged him; and for seven miles, fair or foul going, they followed that racing blotch of red. There were fewer horsemen now, but most of them kept pace, galloping hard behind Sir Jasper and the Squire, who were riding neck for neck. The fox,

as it happened, was in his own country again, after a sojourn he regretted in alien pastures; and he headed straight for the barren lands of rock and scanty herbage that lay up the slopes of Rother Hill. The going was steep and slippery, the scent cold, because snow was lying on these upper lands; and the fox, who knew all this a little better than Pincher, plunged through a snowdrift that hid the opening of his favourite cave and knew himself secure. They could dig him out from a burrow, but this cave was long and winding, and all its quiet retreats were known to him.

Pincher, the grey, hefty hound, plunged his nose into the snow, then withdrew it and began to whimper. He was unused to this departure from the usual rules of fox-hunting; the snow was wet and chilly, and touched, maybe, some note of superstition common to hounds and hill-bred men. Superstition, at any rate, or some grave feeling, was patent in the faces of the riders. The huntsman, knowing the windings of the cave as well as Reynard, gathered his pack.

"They'd be lost for ever and a day, Sir Jasper," he growled, "if once they got into that cave. I followed it once for a mile and a half myself, and then didn't reach the end of it."

Sir Jasper glanced at Squire Demaine, and found the same doubt in his face. They had chosen this gallop as an augury, and they had not killed. It is slight matters of this sort that are apt constantly to turn the balance of big adventures, and the two older men knew well enough how the waverers were feeling.

"Gentlemen," said Sir Jasper sharply, "we're not like children. There's no omen in all this. I jested when I talked of omens."

"By gad, yes!" sputtered the Squire, backing his friend with a bluster that scarcely hid his own disquiet. "There's only one good omen for to-morrow, friends—a strong body, a sound sword arm, and a leal heart for the King. We'll not go back to the nursery, by your leave, because a fox skulks into hiding."

THE LOYAL MEET

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There was a waving of three-cornered hats again, a murmur of applause; but the note did not ring true and merry, as it had done at the start of this wild gallop. The horses were shivering in a bitter wind that had got up from behind the hollows of the uplands. Grey-blue clouds crept round about the sun and stifled him, and sleet began to fall. They were children of the weather to a man, and to-morrow's ride for London and the Stuart took on the semblance of a Lenten fast.

CHAPTER V.

THE HORSE THIEF

AT Windyhough, Rupert had watched Sir Jasper and his brother ride out to the hunt, had felt the old pang of jealousy and helplessness. They were so hale and keen on the day's business; and he was not one of them.

He turned impatiently from the upper window, not guessing that his father had carried the picture of his tired face with him to the meet. With some thought of getting up into the moor, to still his restlessness, he went down the stair and out into the courtyard. Lady Royd, who had not lain easy in her bed this morning, was standing there. Some stronger call than luxury and well-being had bidden her get up and steal into the windy, nipping air, to watch her men ride out. She was late, as she was for all appointments, and some bitter loneliness had taken hold of her when she found them gone. She had never been one of these gusty, unswerving people here in Lancashire, and their strength was as foreign to her as their weaknesses. Until her marriage with the impulsive northern lover who had come south to the wooing and had captured her girl's fancy, she had lived in the lowlands, where breezes played for frolic only; and the bleakness of these hills had never oppressed her as it did this morning. She forgot the swift and magic beauty that came with the late-won spring, forgot how every slope and dingle of this northern country wakened under the sun's touch, how the stark and empty moor grew rich with colour, how blackbird and lavrock, plover and rook and full-throated thrush made music wild and exquisite under the blue, happy sky. For the present, the wind was nipping; on the higher hill-crests snow lay like a burial-shroud; her husband and the younger son she

idolised were riding out to-morrow on a perilous road because they had listened to that haunting, unhappy melody which all the Stuarts had the gift of sounding.

Lady Royd could not see beyond. Her faith was colder than the hills which frightened her, emptier than this winter-time she hated. She had not once captured the quiet, resolute note that sounded through her husband's conduct of affairs. Let the wind whistle its keenest under a black and sullen sky, Sir Jasper knew that he was chilled, as she did; but he knew, too, that summer would follow, blithe and full of hay-scents, fuller, riper in warmth and well-being, because the months of cold had fed its strength.

She chose to believe that he was playing with a fine, romantic sense of drama, in following the Prince, that he was sacrificing Maurice to the same misplaced zeal. Yet hour by hour and day by day of their long companionship, he had made it plain, to a comrade less unwilling, that he had followed a road marked white at every milestone by a faith that would not budge, an obedience to the call of honour that was instinctive, instant, as the answer of a soldier to his commanding officer. If all went amiss with this Rising, if he gave his life for a lost cause, it did not matter greatly to Sir Jasper; for he was sure that in one world or another, a little sooner or a little later, he would see that Restoration whose promise shone like the morning star above the staunch, unbending hills of Lancashire.

"Who is to gain by it all?" murmured Lady Royd, shivering as she drew her wrap about her. "When I'm widowed, and Maurice has gone, too, to Tower Hill—shall I hate these Stuart fools the less? It matters little who is king—so little—"

She heard Rupert's step behind her, turned and regarded him with that half-tolerant disdain which had stood to her for motherhood. Not long ago she had felt a touch of some divine compassion for him, had been astonished by the pain and happiness that pity teaches; but the mood had passed,

and he stood to her now as a simpleton so exquisite that he had not strength even to follow the stupid creeds he cherished. She was in no temper to spare him; he was a welcome butt on which to vent her weariness of all things under the sun.

They looked at each other, silent, questioning. Big happenings were in the making. The very air of Lancashire these days was instinct with the coming troubles, and folk were restless, ill-at-ease as moor-birds are when thunder comes beating up against the wind.

"It is not my fault, mother," said Rupert brusquely, as if answering some plainly-spoken challenge. "If I had my way, I'd be taking fences, too—but, then, I never had my way."

Lady Royd laughed gently—the frigid, easy laugh that Rupert knew by heart. "A *man*," she said, halting on the word—"a man makes his way, if he's to have it. The babies stay at home, and blame the dear God because He will not let them hunt like other men."

Rupert took fire on the sudden, as he had done not long since when he had fought with his brother on the moor. Old indignities were brought to a head. He did not know what he said; but Lady Royd bent her head, as if a moorland tempest beat about her. It seemed as if the whole unrest, the whole passion and heedlessness, of the Stuart battle against circumstance had gathered to a head in this wind-swept courtyard of the old fighting house of Windyhough.

And the combatants were a spoilt wife on one hand, on the other a scholar who had not yet found his road in life. The battle should have given food for laughter; yet the scholar wore something of his father's dignity and spirit, and the woman was slow to admit a mastery that pleased and troubled her.

Again there was a silence. The east wind was piping through and through the courtyard, and rain was falling; but on the high moors there were drifts of snow that would not yield to the gusty warmth. All was upset, disordered—rain,

and snow, and wind, were all at variance, as if they shared the unrest and the tumult of the times.

"You—you hurt me, Rupert," she said weakly.

"I had no right, mother," he broke in, contrite. "Of course I am the heir—and I was never strong, as you had wished—and—and I spoke in heat."

"I like your heat, boy," she said unexpectedly. "Oh, you were right, were right! You never had a chance."

He put his hand on her arm—gently, as a lover or a courtier might. "Maurice should have been the heir. It cannot be helped, mother—but you've been kind to me through it all."

Lady Royd was dismayed. Her husband had yielded to her whims; the folk about her had liked her beauty, her easy, friendly insolence, the smile which comes easily to women who are spoilt and have luxury at command. She had been sure of herself till now—till now, when the son she had made light of was at pains to salve her conscience. He was a stay-at-home, a weakling. There was no glamour attaching to him, no riding-out to high endeavour among the men who were making or were marring history. Yet now, to the mother's fancy, he was big of stature.

She yielded to a sharp, dismayed pity. "My dear," she said, with a broken laugh, "you talk like your father—like your father when I like him most and disagree with his mad view of life."

Rupert went to bed that night—after his father and Maurice had returned muddied from a hunt he had not shared, after the supper that had found him silent and without appetite—with a sense of keen and personal disaster that would not let him sleep. Through all his dreams—the brave, unspoiled dreams of boyhood—he had seen this Rising take its present shape. His father's teaching, his stealthy reading in the library of books that could only better a sound Stuart faith, had prepared him for the Loyal Meet that was to gather at Windyhough with to-morrow's dawn. But in his dreams he had been a rider among loyal riders, had struck a blow here and

there for the Cause he had at heart. In plain reality, with the wind sobbing round the gables overhead, he was not disciplined enough to join the hunt. He was untrained.

Maurice shared his elder brother's bedroom; and somewhere in the dark hours before the dawn he heard Rupert start from a broken sleep, crying that the Prince was in some danger and needed him. Maurice was tired after the day's hunting, and knew that he must be up betimes; and a man's temper at such times is brittle.

"Get to sleep, Rupert!" he growled. "The Prince will be none the better for your nightmares."

Rupert was silent. He knew it was true. No man would ever be the better, he told himself, for the help of a dreamer and a weakling. He heard his brother turn over, heard the heavy, measured breathing. He had no wish for sleep, but lay listening to the sleet that was driving at the window-panes. It was bitter cold, and dark beyond belief. Whatever chanced with the Prince's march to London, there was something to chill the stoutest faith in this night-hour before the dawn. Yet the scholar chose this moment for a sudden hope, a warmth of impulse and of courage. Down the sleety wind, from the moors he loved, a trumpet-call seemed to ring sharp and clear. And the call sounded boot-and-saddle.

He sprang from bed and dressed himself, halted to be sure that Maurice was still sound asleep, felt his way through the pitch-dark of the room until he reached the door. Then he went down, unbarred the main door with gentle haste, and stood in the windy courtyard. It was a wet night and a stormy one on Windyheights. Now and then the moon ran out between the grey-black, scudding clouds and lit a world made up of rain and emptiness.

And Rupert again heard the clear, urgent call. Slight of body, a thing of small account set in the middle of this majestic uproar of the heath, he squared his shoulders, looked at the house-front, the fields, the naked, wind-swept coppices, to which he was the heir.

Old tradition, some instinct fathered by many generations, rendered him greater than himself. "Get to saddle," said the voice at his ear; and he forgot that the ways of a horse were foreign to him. He glanced once again at the heath, as if asking borrowed strength, then crept like a thief toward the stables.

It was near dawn now. The wind, tired out, had sunk to a low, piping breeze. The moon shone high and white from a sky cleared of all but the filmiest clouds; and over the eastern hummocks of the moor lithe, palpitating streaks of rose, and grey, and amber were ushering up the sun.

All was uproar in the stable-yard, and the future master of these grooms and farm-lads waited in the shadows—a looker-on, as always. He saw a lanthorn swinging up and down the yard, confusing still more the muddled light of moon and dawn; and then he heard Giles, his father's bailiff, laugh as he led out Sir Jasper's horse, and listened while the man swore, with many a rich Lancashire oath, that Rising work was better than keeping books and harrying farmers when they would not pay their rents. And still Rupert waited, watching sturdy yeomen ride in from Pendle Forest, on nags as well built as themselves, to answer Sir Jasper's rally-call.

"'Tis only decent-like, Giles," he heard one ruddy yeoman say, "to ride in a little before our betters need us. I was never one to be late at a hunt, for my part."

"It all gangs gradely," Giles answered cheerily. "By dangment, though, the dawn's nearer than I thought; and I've my own horse to saddle yet."

Rupert waited with great patience for his chance—waited until Giles came out again, leading a thick-set chestnut that had carried him on many a bailiff's errand. And in the waiting his glow of courage and high purpose grew chilled. He watched the lanthorns bobbing up and down the yard, watched the dawn sweep bold and crimson over this crowd of busy folk. He was useless, impotent; he had no part in action, no place among these men, strong of their hands, who were

getting ready for the battle. Yet, under all the cold and shame, he knew that, if he were asked to die for the Cause—asked simply, and without need to show himself a fool at horsemanship—it would be an easy matter.

He looked on, and he was lonelier than in the years behind. Until a day or two ago he had been sure of one thing at least—of his father's trust in him; and Sir Jasper had killed that illusion when he taught his heir how Windyhough was to be defended against attack and afterwards confessed that it was a trick to soothe the lad's vanity.

Yet still he waited, some stubbornness of purpose behind him. And by and by he saw his chance. The stable-yard was empty for the moment. Sir Jasper's men had mustered under the house-front, waiting for their leader to come out. Giles had left his own horse tethered to a ring outside the stable door, while he led the master's grey and Maurice's slim, raking chestnut into the courtyard. From the bridle-track below came the clatter of hoofs, as Sir Jasper's hunting intimates brought in their followers to the Loyal Meet. On that side of the house all was noise, confusion; on this side, the stable-yard lay quiet under the paling moonlight and the ruddy, nipping dawn.

Sir Jasper's heir crossed the yard, as if he planned a theft and feared surprisal. There had been horse-thieves among his kin, doubtless, long ago when the Royds were founding a family in this turbulent and lawless county; and Rupert was but harking back to the times when necessity was the 'day's gospel.

He unslipped the bridle of Giles's horse, and let him through the gate that opened on the pastures at the rear of Windyhough. Then he went in a wide circle round the house, until he reached a wood of birch and rowan that stood just above the Langton road. The wind was up again, and rain with it; and in the downpour Rupert, holding the bridle of a restive horse, waited for the active men to pass him by along the road that led to Prince Charles Edward. He could

not join them at the meet in the courtyard, but he would wait here till they passed, he told himself, would get to saddle afterwards and ride down and follow them. And in the coming battle, may be, he would prove to his father that courage was not lacking, after all, in the last heir of the Royd men.

The front of Windyhough, meanwhile, was busy with men and horses, with sheep-dogs that had followed their masters, unnoticed and unbidden, from the high farms that bordered Windyhough. It might have been Langton market-day, so closely and with such laughing comradeship yeomen, squires, and hinds rubbed shoulders, while dogs ran in and out between their legs and horses whinnied to each other. The feudal note was paramount. There was no distrust here, no jealousy of class against class; the squires were pledged to defend those who followed them with healthy and implicit confidence, their men were loyal in obedience that was neither blind nor stupid, but trained by knowledge and the sense of discipline, as a soldier's is. Each squire was a kingly father to the men he had gathered from his own acres. In all things, indeed, this gathering at Windyhough was moved by the clan spirit that had made possible the Prince's gathering of an army in Scotland—that small, ill-equipped army which had already routed General Cope at Prestonpans, had compelled Edinburgh to applaud its pluck and gallantry, had taken Carlisle Castle, and now was marching through a country, disaffected for the most part, on the forlornest hope that ever bade men leave warm hearths.

Sir Jasper, standing near the main door of Windyhough, watched the little companies ride in. He was keen and buoyant, and would not admit that he was troubled because his own judgment and that of his friends was justified. He had guessed that one in five of those who had passed their claret over the water would prove their faith; and he had calculated to a nicety. One whom he had counted a certain absentee was here, to be sure—young Hunter of Hunterscliff, whose tongue was more harum-scarum than his heart. But, against this

gain of a sword-arm and a dozen men, he had to set Will Underwood's absence. Some easy liking for Will's horsemanship, some instinct to defend him against the common distrust, had prompted him to an obstinate, half-hearted faith in the man. Yet he was not here, and Sir Jasper guessed unerringly what the business was that had taken him wide of Lancashire.

Squire Demaine was the last to ride in with his men. He could afford to be late; for Pendle Hill, round and stalwart up against the crimson, rainy sky, would as soon break away from its moorings as Roger Demaine prove truant to his faith.

It was wet and cold, and the errand of these men was not one to promise warmth for many a day to come. Yet they raised a cheer when old Roger pushed his big, hard-bitten chestnut through the crowd. And when they saw that his daughter was with him, riding the grey mare that had known many a hunting morn, their cheers grew frantic. For at these times men learn the way of their hearts, and know the folk whose presence brings a sense of well-being.

Sir Jasper had not got to saddle yet. He stood at the door, with his wife and Maurice, greeting all new-comers, and hoping constantly that there were laggards to come in. He reached up a hand to grasp the Squire's.

"The muster's small, old friend," he said.

"Well, what else?" growled Roger. "We know our Lancashire—oh, by the Heart, we know it through and through." He glanced round the courtyard, with the free, wind-trained eye that saw each face, each detail. "There's few like to make a hard bed for themselves, Jasper. Best leave our feather-bed folk at home."

Sir Jasper, with a twinge of pain to which long use had accustomed him, thought of Rupert, his heir. He glanced aside from the trouble, and for the first time saw that Nance was close behind her father.

"Does Nance go with us?" he asked, with a quick smile.

"She can ride as well as the best of us—we know as much, but women are not soldiers these days, Roger."

Squire Demaine looked round for a face he did not find. "No, she stays here at Windyhough. Where's Rupert? I always trusted that quiet lad."

"He's gone up to the moors, sir, I think," said Maurice, with some impulse to defend the absent brother. "He was full of nightmares just before dawn—talking of the Prince, who needed him—and he was gone when I got up at day-break."

"Well, he'll return," snapped the Squire; "and, though I say it, he'll find a bonnie nestling here at Windyhough. Nance, tell the lad that I trust him. And now, Jasper, we'll be late for the meet on the Langton Road, unless we bestir ourselves."

Sir Jasper, under all his unswerving zeal, grew weak with a fine human tenderness. He turned, caught his wife's glance, wondered in some odd, dizzy way why he had chosen to tear his heart out by the roots. And Rupert was not here; he had longed to say goodbye to him, and he was hiding somewhere, full of shame that was too heavy for his years—oh, yes, he knew the lad!

He passed a hand across his eyes, stooped for a moment and whispered some farewell message to his wife, then set his foot into the stirrup that Giles was holding for him. His face cleared. He had chosen the way of action—and the road lay straight ahead.

"We're ready, gentlemen, I take it?" he said. "Good! The Prince might chance to be a little earlier at the meet. We'd best be starting."

Nance had slipped from the saddle, and stood, with the bridle in her hand, watching the riders get into some semblance of a well-drilled company of horse. At another time her quick eye would have seen the humour of it. Small farmers—and their hinds, on plough-horses—were jostling thoroughbreds. Rough faces that she knew were self-conscious

of a new dignity ; rough lips were muttering broad, lively oaths as if still they were engaged in persuading their mounts to drive a straight furrow.

Yet to Nance the dignity, the courage, the overwhelming pity of it all were paramount. The rain and the ceaseless wind in the courtyard here—the wintry moors above, with sleet half covering their black austerity—the uneasy whinnying of horses that did not like this cold snap of wind, telling of snow to come—all made up the burden of a song that was old as Stuart haplessness and chivalry.

The muttered oaths, the restlessness, died down. The drill of months had found its answer now. Rough farmers, keen-faced yeomen, squires gently-bred, were an ordered company. They were equals here, met on a grave business that touched their hearts. And Nance gained courage, while she watched the men look quietly about them, as if they might not see the Lancashire moors again, and were anxious to carry a clear picture of the homeland into the unknown. It seemed that loyalty so grim, and so unquestioning, was bound to have its way.

She saw, too, that Sir Jasper was resolute, with a cheeriness that admitted no denial, saw that her father carried the same easy air. Then, with a brisk air of command, Sir Jasper gathered up his reins and lifted his hat.

“ For the King, gentlemen ! ” he said. “ It is time we sought the Langton Road.”

It was so they rode out, through a soaking rain and a wind that nipped to the bone; and Nance, because she was young and untried as yet, felt again the chill of bitter disappointment. Like Rupert, her childish dreams had been made up of this Loyal Meet that was to happen one day. Year by year it had been postponed. Year by year she had heard her elders talk of it, when listeners were not about, until it had grown to the likeness of a fairy-tale, in which all the knights were brave and blameless, all the dragons evil and beyond reach of pity for the certain end awaiting them.

And now the tale was coming true, so far as the riding out went. The hunt was up; but there was no flashing of swords against the clear sunlight she had pictured, no ringing cheers, no sudden music of the pipes. These knights of the fairy-tale had proved usual men—men with their sins and doubts and personal infirmities, who went on the Prince's business as if they rode to kirk in time of Lent. She was too young to understand that the faith behind this rainy enterprise sang swifter and more clear than any music of the pipes.

She heard them clatter down the road. She was soaked to the skin, and her mare was fidgeting on the bridle which she still held over-tight, forgetting that she grasped it.

"You will come indoors, Nance?" said Lady Royd, shivering at the door. "They've gone, and we are left—and that's the woman's story always. Men do not care for us, except as playthings when they see no chance of shedding blood."

Nance came out from her dreams. Not the quiet riding-out, not the rain and the bitter wind, had chilled her as did the knowledge that Will Underwood was absent from the meet. She had hoped, without confessing it, that young Hunter's gibe of yesterday would be disproved, that Will would be there, whatever business had taken him abroad, in time to join his fellows. He was not there; and, in the hand that was free of her mare's bridle, she crushed the kerchief she had had in readiness. He had asked for it, to wear when he rode out—and he had not claimed it—and her pride grew resolute and hot, as if one of her father's hinds had laughed at her.

"You're wet and shivering, child," said Lady Royd, her temper frayed, as always, when men were stupid in their need to get away from feather-beds. "I tell you, men are all alike—they follow any will-o'-the-wisp, and name him Faith. Faith? What has it done for you or me?"

Nance quivered, as her mare did, here in the soaking rain and the wind that would not be quiet. Yet she was resolute, obedient to her training. "Faith?" she said, with an odd directness and simplicity. "It will have to help us through

the waiting-time. What else? We are only women here, and men too old for battle——”

“ You forget Rupert,” broke in the other, with the tired disdain that Nance hated. The girl did not know how Lady Royd was suffering, how heart and strength and sense of well-being had gone out with the husband who was all in all to her. “ Rupert—the heir—is here to guard us, Nance. The wind will rave about the house—dear heart! how it will rave, and cry, and whistle—but Rupert will be here! He’ll quiet our fears for us. He is—so resolute, shall we say?—so stay-at-home. Cannot you see the days to come?” she went on, seeking a weak relief from pain in wounding others. “ Rupert will come down to us o’ nights, when the corridors are draughty with their ghosts, and will tell us he’s been reading books—that we need fear no assault, surprisal, because good King Charles died for the true faith.” She drew her wrap about her and shivered.

She was so dainty, so young of face, that her spite against the first-born gathered strength by contrast. And, somehow, warmth returned to Nance, though she was forlorn enough, and wet to the skin. “ So he did,” she answered quickly. “ No light talk can alter that. The King died—when he might have bought his life. He *disdained* to save himself.”

Lady Royd laughed gently. “ Oh, come indoors, my girl. You’ll find Rupert there—and you can put your heads together, studying old books.”

“ Old books? Surely we’ve seen a new page turned to-day? These men who gathered to the Loyal Meet—were they fools, or bookish? Did they show like men who were riding out for pastime?”

“ My dear,” said Lady Royd, with a tired laugh, “ the Stuart faith becomes you. I see what Sir Jasper meant, when he said one day that you were beautiful, and I would have it that you had only the prettiness of youth. Rupert——”

Nance stood at bay, her head up. She did not know her heart, or the reason of this quiet, courageous fury that had

settled on her. "Rupert fought on the moor—for my sake; you saw the plight Maurice came home in. I tell you, Rupert can fight like other men."

"Oh, yes—for books, and causes dead before our time."

"The Cause lives, Lady Royd—to Rupert and myself," broke in Nance impulsively.

So then the elder woman glanced at her with a new, mocking interest. "So the wind sits there, child, does it? It is 'Rupert and I' to-day—and to-morrow it will be 'we'—and what will Mr. Underwood think of the pretty foolery, I wonder?"

The girl flushed. This tongue of Lady Royd's—it was so silken, and yet it bit like an unfriendly wind. "Mr. Underwood's opinion carries little weight these days," she said, gathering her pride together. "He is known already as the man who shirked his first big fence and ran away."

"Oh, then, you're like the rest of them! All's hunting here, it seems—you cannot speak without some stupid talk of fox, or hounds, or fences. For my part, I like Will Underwood. He's smooth and easy, and a respite from the weather."

"Yes. He is that," assented Nance, with something of the other's irony.

"He's a rest, somehow, from all the wind and rain and downrightness of Lancashire. But, there! We shall not agree, Nance. You're too like your father and Sir Jasper. Come indoors, and get those wet clothes off. We shall take a chill, the two of us, if we stand here."

Nance shivered, more from heart-chill than from cold of body.

"Yes," she said—"if only some one will take this mare of mine to stable. She's wet and lonely. All her friends have left her—to seek the Langton Road."

Again the older woman was aware of a breadth of sympathy, an instinctive care for their dumb fellows, that marked so many of these hill-folk. It seemed barbarous to her that at a time like this, when women's hearts were breaking for their

men, Nance should be thinking of her mare's comfort and peace of mind.

A step sounded across the courtyard. Both women glanced up sharply, and saw Giles, the bailiff, a ludicrous anger and worry in his face.

"Well, Giles?" asked his mistress, with soft impatience. "Are you a shirker, too?"

"No, my lady. I was not reared that way. Some cursed fool—asking pardon for my plain speech—has stolen my horse. I'll just have to o'ertake them on foot, I reckon—unless—"

His glance rested on Nance's mare, big and strong enough to carry him.

"But, Giles, we keep no horse-thieves at Windyhough," said Lady Royd, in her gentle, purring voice. "Where did you leave him?"

"Tethered to the stable-door, my lady. He couldn't have unslipped the bridle without human hands to help him. It was this way. I had to see Sir Jasper mounted, and Maister Maurice. They're raither feckless-like, unless they've got Giles nigh handy to see that all goes well. Well, after they were up i' saddle, I tried to get through the swarm o' folk i' the courtyard, and a man on foot has little chance. So I bided till they gat away, thinking I'd catch them up; and when they'd ridden a lile way down the road, I ran to th' stable. Th' stable-door was there all right, and th' ring for tething, but blamed if my fiddle-headed horse warn't missing. It was that way, my lady, take it or leave it—and maister will be sadly needing me."

He was business-like in all emergencies, and his glance wandered again, as if by chance, from Nance's face to the mare's bridle that she held.

"There's not a horse in Lancashire just the equal of my chestnut," he said dispassionately; "but I'd put up with another, if 'twere offered me."

Nance, bred on the soil, knew what this sturdy, six-foot fel-

low asked of her. It was hard to give up the one solace she had brought to Windyhough—her mare, who would take her long scampers up the pastures and the moor when she needed room about her.

"She could not carry you, Giles," said the girl, answering the plain meaning behind his words.

"Ay, blithely, miss. But, then, you wouldn't spare her, like."

There was a moment's silence. Nance was asked to give up something for the Cause—something as dear to her as hedge-rows, and waving sterns of hounds, and a game fox ahead. Then she put the bridle into Giles's hand.

"On second thoughts"—she halted to stroke the mare's neck—"I think, Giles, she'll carry you. Tell Sir Jasper that the women, too, are leal, though they're compelled to stay at home."

Giles wasted little time in thanks. Business-like, even in this matter of running his neck into a halter, he sprang to the mare's back. He would be sore before the day was out, because the saddle was wringing wet by this time; but he was used to casual hardships.

Lady Royd watched the bailiff ride quickly down the road, heard the last hoof-beats die away. "You are odd, you folk up here," she said, with a warmer note in her tired voice. "You did not give up your mare lightly, Nance—and to Giles, of all men. Who stole his horse, think you?"

Nance answered without knowing she had framed the thought. "Rupert is missing, too," she said, with an odd, wayward smile. "I told you he had pluck."

Yet, after they had gone indoors, after she had changed her riding-gear, Nance sat in the guest-chamber upstairs, and could think only of Will Underwood. Her dreams of him had been so pleasant, so loyal; she was not prepared to trample on them. She saw him giving her a lead on many a bygone hunting-day—saw the eager face, and heard his low, persuasive voice.

Nance was steadfast, even to disproven trust. She caught hold of Sir Jasper's challenge yesterday, when men had doubted Will. He would join them on the southward march. Surely he would, knowing how well she liked him. And the kerchief he had asked for—it must wait, until he came in his own time to claim it.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCE COMES SOUTH

RUPERT stood in the little wood that bordered the Langton road, waiting for Sir Jasper's company of horse to pass. It would have been chilling work for hardier folk. The rain soaked him to the skin; the wind stabbed from behind, as the sly north-easter does. He had no prospect of joining his friends as yet; his one hope was to follow them, like a culprit fearing detection, until they and he had ridden so far from Windyhough that they could not turn him back to eat his heart out among the women.

Yet he was aglow with a sense of adventure. He was looking ahead, for the first time in his life, to the open road that he could share at last with braver men. The horse he had borrowed from Giles was tugging at the bridle. He checked it sharply, with a firmness that surprised the pair of them. He was conscious of a curious gaiety and strength.

Far down the road at last he heard the clink of hoofs, then a sharp word of command, and afterwards the gaining tumult of horsemen trotting over sloppy ground. His horse began to whinny, to strain at the bridle, wondering what the lad was at. He quieted him as best he could, and the Loyal Meet that swept past below him had neither thought nor hearing for the uproar in the wood above.

Rupert saw his father and Squire Demaine riding with set faces at the head of their motley gathering. Then, after all had passed and the road seemed clear, there came again the beat of hoofs from the far distance—the hoofs of one horse only, drumming feverishly along the road. And soon Giles, the bailiff, passed him at a sweltering gallop; and Rupert saw that he was riding Nance's mare.

The scholar laughed suddenly. Intent on his own business, he had not guessed until now that Giles would be troubled when he found his fiddle-headed horse stolen. He could picture the bailiff's face, could hear his broad and Doric speech, when he found himself without a mount. It was astonishing to Rupert that he could laugh at such a time, for he was young to the open road, and had yet to learn what a solace laughter is to hard-bitten men who fear to take big happenings over-seriously.

He heard Giles gallop out of earshot. Then he led his horse through the wood and down into the highroad. There was no onlooker to smile at his clumsy horsemanship, and for that reason he mounted lightly and handled the reins with easy firmness; and his horse, doubtful until now, found confidence in this new rider.

The sun was well up, but it had no warmth. Its watery light served only to make plainer the cold, sleety hills, the drab-coloured slush of the trampled highway. Only a fool, surely—a fool with some instinct for the forlorn hope—could have woven romance about this scene of desolation. Yet Rupert's courage was high, his horse was going blithely under him. He was picturing the crowd of wiser men whom he had watched ride by—the gentry, the thick-thewed yeomen whose faces were known to him from childhood, the jolly farmers who had taken their fences on more cheery hunting days than this. Something stirred at the lad's heart as he galloped in pursuit—some reaching back to the olden days, some sense of forward, eager hope. So had the men of Craven, just over the Yorkshire border, ridden up to Flodden generations since—ridden from the plough and hunting-field to a battle that gave them once for all their place in song and story.

And he, the Scholar, was part, it seemed, of this later riding out that promised to bring new fame to Lancashire. All was confused to him as he urged Giles's fiddle-headed nag to fresh endeavour. Old tales of warfare, passed on from mouth to

mouth along the generations, were mingled with this modern battle that was in the making London way; voices from the elder days stole down and whispered to him from the windy, driven moors that had been his playmates. As if some miracle had waited for him at the crossways of the Rising, where many had chosen the road of doubt and some few the track of faith, Rupert knew himself the heir at last—the heir his father had needed all these years.

His seat in the saddle was one that any knowledgeable horseman might praise. The bailiff's chestnut was galloping with a speed that had taken fire from the rider's need to catch up the Loyal Meet. Rupert was so sure of himself, so sanguine. He had let his friends ride forward without him because he had not known how to tell them that at heart he was no fool; and now, when he overtook them, they would understand at last.

They pounded over a straight, level stretch of road just between Conie Cliff Wood and the little farm at the top of Water Ghyll, and Rupert saw Bailiff Giles half a mile in front of him. Giles was doing his best to ruin Nance's mare for life in his effort to catch up the hunt; and so Rupert, in the man's way, must needs ask more of his own horse, too, than need demanded. He would catch up the bailiff, he told himself, would race past him, would turn in saddle with a careless shout that Giles would be late for the Meet unless he stirred himself. His mood was the more boyish because until he fought with his brother on the moors a while since he had not tasted real freedom.

It was not his fault, nor his horse's, that they came heedlessly to a corner of the road where it dipped down a greasy, curving slope. In the minds of both there was the need for haste, and they were riding straight, the two of them. His fiddle-headed beast slipped at the turning of the corner, reeled half across the road in his effort to recover, and threw his rider. When Rupert next awoke to knowledge of what was

going forward he found himself alone. Far down the road he could hear the rattle of his horse as it galloped madly after its brethren that carried Sir Jasper's company.

Sir Jasper, meanwhile, had got to Langton High Street, had drawn his men up on either side of the road. Their horses were muddied to the girths. The riders were wet to the skin, splashed and unheroic. Yet from the crowd that had gathered from the rookeries and the by-streets of the town—a crowd not any way disposed to reverence the call of a Stuart to his loyal friends—a murmur of applause went up. They had looked for dainty gentlemen, playing at heroics while the poor ground at the mill named "daily bread." They saw instead a company of horse whose members were not insolent, or gay, or free from weariness. They saw working farmers, known to them by sight, who were not accounted fools on market-days. Some glimmering of intelligence came to these townsfolk who led bitter lives among the by-streets. There must be "some queer mak' o' sense about it," they grumbled one to another, as they saw that the Loyal Meet was wet to the skin, and grave and resolute. It was the like resolution—dumb, and without help from loyalty to a high Cause—that had kept many of them faithful to their wives, their children, their houses in the back alleys of Langton Town.

The rain ceased for a while, and the sun came struggling through a press of clouds. And up through the middle of the street, between the two lines of horsemen and the chattering crowd behind, a single figure walked. He was big in length and beam, and he moved as if he owned the lives of men; and the shrill wind blew his cassock round him.

Sir Jasper moved his horse into the middle of the street, stooped, and grasped the vicar's hand.

"We're well met, I think," he said. "What's your errand, Vicar?"

"Oh, just to ring the church bells. My ringer is a George's man—so's my sexton; and I said to both of them, in a plain parson's way, that I'd need shriving if Langton, one way or

t'other, didn't ring a Stuart through the town. I can handle one bell, if not the whole team of six."

Sir Jasper laughed. So did his friends. So did the rabble looking on.

"It's well we're here to guard you," said Sir Jasper, glancing at the crowd, whose aspect did not promise well for church bells and such temperate plain-song.

"By your leave, no," the Vicar answered with a jolly laugh. "I know these folk o' Langton. They should know me, too, by now, seeing how often I've whipped 'em from the pulpit—and at other times—yes, at other times, maybe."

The Vicar, grey with endeavour and constancy to his trust, was vastly like Rupert, riding hard in quest of a boy's first adventure. He stood to his full height, and nodded right and left to the townsmen who were pressing already between the flanks of Stuart horses.

"Men o' Langton," he said, his voice deep, cheery, resonant, "Sir Jasper says I need horsemen to guard me in my own town. Give him your answer."

The loyal horse, indeed, were anxious for the Vicar's safety, seeing this rabble swarm into the middle of the High Street, through the double line of riders that had kept them back till now. They were riding forward already, but the parson waved them back.

The Vicar stood now in the thick of a roaring crowd that had him at its mercy. Sir Jasper, who loved a leal man, tried to get his horse a little nearer, but could not without riding down defenceless folk; and, while he and his friends were in grave anxiety and doubt, a sudden hum of laughter came from the jostling crowd.

"Shoulder him, lads!" cried one burly fellow.

Five other stalwarts took up the cry, and the Vicar, protesting with great cheeriness, was lifted shoulder high. And gradually it grew clear to the Loyal Meet that the parson, as he had boasted, was safe—nay, was beloved—among these working-folk of Langton.

They moved up the street, followed by the rabble, and the two lines of the Loyal Meet were facing each other once more across the emptying roadway. And by and by, from the old church on the hill, a furious peal rang out. The Vicar, who was a keen horseman himself, had named his bells "a team of six"; and never in its history, perhaps, had the team been driven with such recklessness. The parson held one rope—one rein, as he preferred to call it—and knew how to handle it. But his five allies had only goodwill to prompt them in their attempt to ring a peal.

There was noise enough, to be sure; and across the uproar another music sounded—music less full-bodied, but piercing, urgent, not to be denied.

Sir Jasper lifted his head, as a good hound does when he hears the horn. "Gentlemen," he said, "the pipes, the blessed pipes! D'ye hear them? The Prince is near."

They scarcely heard the jangling bells. Keen, swift, triumphant, the sweetest music in the world came louder and louder round the bend of Langton Street. The riders could not sit still in saddle, but were drumming lightly with their feet, as if their stirrups were a dancing-floor. Their horses fidgeted and neighed.

And then Prince Charles Edward came into Langton, and these gentry of the Loyal Meet forgot how desolate and cold the dawn had been. Some of them had waited thirty years for this one moment; others, the youngsters and the middle-aged, had been reared on legends of that unhappy '15 Rising which had not chilled the faith of Lancashire. And all seemed worth while now, here in the sunlit street, that was wet and glistening with the late persistent rain.

The Prince rode alone, his officers a few yards in the rear, and behind them the strange army, made up of Scottish gentry, of Highlanders in kilts, of plain Lowland farmers armed with rusty swords, with scythe-blades fixed on six-foot poles, with any weapon that good luck had given to their hands.

It was not this motley crew that Sir Jasper saw, nor any of

his company. It was not Lord Murray, a commanding figure at another time; not Lochiel, lean and debonair and princely, though both rode close behind the Prince.

The Prince himself drew all men's eyes. His clothes, his Highland bonnet, had suffered from the muddy wet; the bright hair, that had pleased ladies up in Edinburgh not long ago when he danced at Holyrood, was clotted by the rain. He stood plainly on his record as a man, without any of the fripperies to which women give importance.

And the record was graven on his tired, eager face. Forced marches had told on him. His sleepless care for the least among his followers had told on him. He knew that Marshal Wade was hurrying from Northumberland to overtake him, that he was riding through a country worse than hostile—a country indifferent for the most part, whose men were reckoning up the chances either way, and choosing as prudence, not the heart, dictated. Yet behind him was some unswerving purpose; and, because he had no doubt of his own faith, he seemed to bring a light from the farther hills into this muddy street of Langton.

He drew rein, and those behind him pulled up sharply. The pipes ceased playing, and it seemed as if a healthy, nipping wind had ceased to blow from these sleet-topped hills of Lancashire. The Loyal Meet rose in their stirrups, and their uproar drowned the Vicar's bells. They were men applauding a stronger man, and the pipes themselves could find no better music.

Sir Jasper rode forward with bared head, and the Prince, doffing his bonnet in return, reached out a capable, firm hand.

"Leal and punctual, sir. I give you greeting," he said.

And the tears, do as he would, were in Sir Jasper's eyes. This man with the fair, disordered hair and the face that laughed its weariness away, was kingly, resolute, instinct with the larger air that comes of long apprenticeship to royalty. He and the Loyal Meet and all the ragged army might be on their way to execution before the week was out; but the Prince

was following this day's business without fear of the morrow, as creed and training taught him.

"All Langton gives your Highness greeting," answered Sir Jasper, faltering a little because his feelings were so stirred. "Our bells are ringing you into your kingdom."

The Prince glanced keenly at him, at the faces of the Loyal Meet. He was quick of intuition, and saw, for the first time since crossing the Border, that light of zeal, of courage to the death, which he had hoped to find in England.

"We're something wet and hungry," he said, with the quiet laugh that had less mirth than sadness in it. "You hearten us, I think. My father, as I was setting sail, bade me remember that Lancashire was always the county of fair women and clean faith."

Lord Murray was tired and wet, like the rest of the army; and, to add to his evil plight, he was consumed by the jealousy and self-importance that were his besetting luxuries. "The church bells, your Highness," he said, glancing up the street—"I trust it's no ill omen that they ring so desperately out of tune."

Sir Jasper saw the Prince move impatiently in saddle, saw him struggle with some irritation that was not of yesterday. And he felt, rather than framed the clear thought, that there were hot-and-cold folk among the Scots, as here in Lancashire.

Then the Prince's face cleared. "My lord Murray," he said suavely, "all bells ring in tune when loyal hands are at the ropes. Your ear, I think, is not trained to harmony. And now, gentlemen, what food is in your town? Enough to give a mouthful to us all? Good! We can spare an hour in Langton, and after that we must be jogging forward."

The hour was one of surprise to Sir Jasper and his friends. Here was an army strong enough to raid the town, to break into the taverns, to commit licence and excess; yet there was no licence, nor thought of it. A Stuart, his fair hair mud-died and unkempt, had charge of this march south; and his will was paramount, because his army loved him. No fear, no

usual soldier's obedience to discipline, could have hindered these Scots from rapine when they found the town's resources scanty for their hunger; but the fearlessness, the comradeship of their leader had put honour, sharp as a sword, between temptation and themselves.

"We must foot our bill here, Sir Jasper," said the Prince as they were preparing to ride out again.

"Oh, that can wait——"

"No, by your leave! Theft is the trade of men who steal thrones. I will not have it said that any town in England was poorer because a Stuart came that way. Lochiel, you carry our royal purse," he broke off, with a quick, impulsive laugh. "Peep into it and see how much is left."

"Enough to pay our score, your Highness."

"Then we're rich, Lochiel! We may be poor to-morrow, but to-day we're rich enough to pay our debts."

A half-hour later they rode out into the wintry, ill-found roads, into the open country, wet and desolate, that was guarded by sleet-covered uplands. And Sir Jasper, who had the countryman's superstitious outlook on the weather, remembered Lord Murray, his cold, easy smile, as he said that the Langton bells were ringing out of tune.

A mile south from Langton, as Giles, the bailiff at Windyhough, was riding not far behind the gentry—having at heart the need to keep his master well in sight—a fiddle-headed horse came blundering down the road. The beast was creamed with foam, and he scattered the footmen right and left as he made forward. Only when he reached Giles's side he halted, stood shivering with the recoil from his own wild gallop, and pushed his nose up against the bailiff's bridle-hand. And Giles, with scant respect for the mare that had carried him so far, slipped from the saddle, and fussed about the truant as if he were a prodigal returned. Giles did not heed that he was holding up all the men behind, that the gentlemen in front had drawn rein, aware of some disturbance in the rear, and that the Prince himself was asking what the trouble was.

"Where hast been, old lad? I thought thee lost," the bailiff was muttering, with all a countryman's disregard of bigger issues when his heart was touched. And the horse could not tell him that, after throwing Rupert, he had lost sight of the master he pursued and had wasted time in seeking him down casual by-roads. "Ye've had an ill rider, by the look o' thee. Ye threw him, likely? Well, serve him right—serve him varry right."

Giles, with a slowness that suggested he had all the time in the world to spare, got to the back of the fiddle-headed chestnut, and felt at home again.

"What mun I do wi' this lile nag?" he asked dispassionately, still holding the reins of Nance's borrowed mare.

Sir Jasper, seeing that his bailiff was the cause of this unexpected check, could not keep back his laughter.

"What is the pleasantry?" asked the Prince. "Tell it me. I think we need a jest or two, if we're to get safely over these evil roads of yours."

"Oh, it is naught, your Highness—naught at all, unless you know Giles as I do. He thinks more of that fiddle-headed horse of his than of the pick amongst our Lancashire hunters—and he's holding up our whole advance."

"What mun I do wi' the mare?" repeated Giles, looking round him with a large impassiveness. "I can't take a led mare to Lunnon and do my share o' fighting by the way. It stands to reason I mun have one hand free."

The Prince, whose instinct for the humour of the road had put heart into his army since the forced march began, looked quietly for a moment at Giles's face. Its simplicity, masking a courage hard as bog-oak, appealed to him. "By your leave, Sir Jasper," he said, "my horse will scarcely last the day out—these roads have punished him. I shall be glad of the mare, if you will lend her to me."

When the march was moving forward again, the Prince in the grey mare's saddle, Lord Murray turned to an intimate who rode beside him. "His Highness forgets old saws," he

murmured, with the insolent assurance that attaches to the narrow-minded "Never change horses when crossing a stream"—surely all prudent Scotsmen know the superstition."

But Sir Jasper, riding close beside the Prince, did not hear him. His heart, in its own way, was simple as Giles's, and he was full of pride. "I wish my god-daughter could know," he said.

"Your god-daughter?" echoed the other.

"Yes—Nance Demaine. It is her mare you've borrowed, sir—and I should know, seeing I gave it her—though for the life of me I can't guess how she chanced to join the Rising."

The Prince smiled as his glance met Sir Jasper's. "There's no chance about this Rising," he said pleasantly, as if he talked of the weather or the crops. "We're going to the Throne, my friend, or to the death; but, either way, there's no chance about it—and no regrets, I think."

Sir Jasper felt again that sharp, insistent pity which had come to him at sight of the yellow-haired laddie who had left women's hearts aching up across the border. In this wild campaign it seemed that he had met a friend. And he spoke, as comrades do, disdaining ceremony.

"That is the faith I hold," he said, with an odd gentleness that seemed to have the strength of the moors behind it. "Comrades are few on the road o' life, your Highness."

The Prince glanced at him, as he had glanced at Giles not long ago—shrewdly, with mother-wit and understanding. "They're few," he said—"and priceless. I would God, sir, that you'd infect my lord Murray with something of your likeable, warm spirit."

And Sir Jasper sighed, as he looked far down the road to London, and reckoned up the leagues of hardship they must traverse. Their task was perilous enough for men united in common zeal; dissension from within, of which he had already heard more hints than one, was a more dangerous enemy than Marshal Wade and all his army of pursuit.

Yet Sir Jasper had relief in action, in the need to meet

every workaday happening of the march. With his son, thrown on the Langton Road, and listening to the hoof-beats of the runaway horse as he went to join the Rising, the case was otherwise. His one comrade had deserted him. He was here on the empty road, with failure for his sole companion. His first impulse was the horse's—to run fast and hard, in the hope of overtaking his own kind. He ran forward dizzily, tripped over a stone that some wagoner had used to check his wheel while he rested his team, got up again, and felt a sharp, throbbing pain in his right ankle. He tried to plod on, for all that, his face set London way—failed, and sat down by the wet roadside. And the wheels of circumstance passed over him, numbing his faith in God.

They all but crushed him. He had dreamed of Prince Charles Edward; had learned at last to sit a horse, because he needed to follow where high enterprise was in the doing; had known the luxury of a gallop in pursuit of men who had thought him short of initiative.

And now he was the Scholar again. His horse had failed him. His own feet had played him false. He sat there, wet and homeless, and from the cloudy hills a smooth, contemptuous voice came whispering at his ear. Best be done with a life that had served him ill. He was a hindrance to himself, to his friends. Best creep down to the pool at the road-foot; he had bathed there often in summer and knew its depth. Best end it all—the shame, the laughter of strong men, the constant misadventure that met him by the way. He was weak and accursed. None would miss him if he went to sleep.

"No," he said deliberately, as if answering an enemy in human shape, "a Royd could not do it."

Sir Jasper's view of his first-born was finding confirmation. The soul of the lad had been tempered to a nicety, and the bodily pain scarce troubled him, as he set his face away from London and the Prince, and limped toward home. Now and then he was forced to rest, because sickness would not let him see the road ahead; but always he got up again. Self-blame

had grown to be a mischievous habit with him, and he was ashamed now that he had deserted his allotted post. True, his father, in bidding him guard Windyhough, had practised a tender fraud on him; but he had given his word, and had been false to it when the first haphazard temptation met him by the way. It had been so easy to steal Giles's horse, so easy to scamper off along the road of glamour, so bitter-hard to stay among the women.

The lad was over-strained and heartsick, ready to make molehills into mountains; yet his shame was bottomed on sound instinct. He came of a soldier-stock, and in the tissues of him was interwoven this contempt for the sentry who forsook his post. No danger threatened Windyhough. He was returning to a duty which, in itself, was idle; but he had pledged his word.

He struggled forward. The road to London was not for him; but at least he could keep faith with the father who was riding now, no doubt, beside the Prince.

CHAPTER VII

THE HEIR RETURNS

AT Windyhough, Martha the dairymaid was restless, like all the women left about the house. She could not settle to her work, though it was churning-day, and good cream was likely to be wasted. Martha at five-and-thirty, had not found a mate, yet she would have made a good wife to any man; strong, supple, with wind and roses in her cheeks, she was born to matronhood; though, by some blindness that had hindered the farmer-folk about her when she crossed their path, she had not found her road in life. And, in her quiet, practical way, she knew that the shadows were beginning to lengthen down her road, that she might very well go on dairying, eating, sleeping, till they buried her in the churchyard of St. John's—no more, no less.

The prospect had never shown so cheerless as it did just now. The men, as their habit was, had all the luck; they had gone off on horseback, pretending that some cause or other took them into open country. For her part, she was tired of being left behind.

Lady Royd was indoors. The housekeeper was not about to keep the maids attentive to routine. All was silent and lack-lustre; and Martha went down the road till she reached the gate at its foot—the gate that stood open after letting the Loyal Meet ride through.

"It's queer and lonesome, when all's said," she thought, swinging gently on the gate. "Men are bothersome cattle—full o' tempers and contrariness—but, dear heart, I miss their foolishness."

She thought the matter out for lack of better occupation, but came to no conclusion. In front of her, as she sat on the

top bar of the gate, she could see the muddied hoof-tracks that marked the riding-out. Her own father, her two brothers, were among Sir Jasper's company; they were thrifty, common-sense folk, like herself, and she wondered if there was something practical, after all, in this business that had left Windyhough so empty and so silent.

A man's figure came hobbling up the road—a broad, well-timbered figure enough, but bent about the legs and shoulders. It was Simon Foster, coming in tired out from roaming up and down the pastures. Though scarce turned fifty, he had been out with the '15 Rising, thirty years ago; but rheumatism had rusted his joints before their time, and to-day, because he was not fit to ride with halfer men, he had kept away from the Meet at Windyhough, for he dared not trust himself to stand an onlooker at this new Rising.

Martha got down from the gate, and opened it with a mock curtsey. "I'm pleased to see a man, Simon," she said, moved by some wintry coquetry. "I began to fancy, like, we were all women here at Windyhough."

"So we are," he growled—"but I'd set ye in your places, that I would, if nobbut I could oil my joints."

"You've come home in a nice temper, Simon."

"Ay, lass, and I'll keep it, till I know whether Sir Jasper has set a crown on the right head. It isn't easy, biding here wi' Lancashire weather—"

"And Lancashire witches," put in Martha, with sly provocation.

Simon was tired, and had nothing especial to do; so he stayed awhile, telling himself that a maid's blandishments, though daft and idle, were one way of passing the time. "Oh, ay, you're snod enough, Martha," he said, rubbing his lean chin. "I've seen few in my time to better ye."

"Now, Simon! And they say your tongue is rough as an old file. For my part, I allus knew ye could be kind and easy, if ye'd a mind to."

"I war a bit of a devil once, may be," he admitted, with a

slow, pleasant laugh, as if he praised himself unduly for past escapades. "Ay, a bit of a devil, Martha. I'll own to it. But rheumatiz has taught me sense since them days."

"Sense is as you take it, Simon. Ye might shoot wider o' the mark than to peep at a lass's een, just whiles, like."

Simon Foster, feeling that their talk grew warmer than mere pleasantry demanded, glanced away from the topic. "I saw summat on my way down fro' the moor," he said, dry and matter-of-fact once more. "There's no accounting for it, but I saw it with my two eyes, and I'm puzzled. You wouldn't call me less than sober, Martha?"

"No," she put in dryly. "Sobriety was allus a little bit of a failing wi' ye, Simon. There's times to be sober, I allus did say—and times to be playful, as the kitten said to the tabby-cat."

"Well, I happened to look into th' sky, just as I'd getten past Timothy Wantless's barn, and I saw summat," went on Simon stolidly.

"So ye went star-gazing? Shame on ye! Only lads i' their courting time go star-gazing."

"Maybe. But it was daylight, as it happened, and I wasn't thinking o' courtship—not just then," he added guardedly. "I war thinking of an old mare I meant to sell Timothy Wantless to-morn for twice as much as she's worth. She wasn't fit to carry one o' Sir Jasper's men, and she'll ruin him i' corn afore he comes back fro' Lunnon, and it stands to reason she mun be sold for what she'll fetch. And I war scratching my head, like, wondering how I'd get round Timothy—he's stiff and snappy at a bargain—when I happened to look up—and there war men on horseback, fair i' th' middle o' the sky, riding all as it might have been a hunting day."

"Good sakes! I'll go skerry to my bed, Simon."

"It war queer, I own; and, if they'd been on safe ground, I'd have run in to see what 'twas all about; but, seeing they were up above, I watched 'em a while, and then I left 'em to it."

Martha's brief mood of superstition passed. "Simon, you're as sober as a man that's never had th' chance to step into an ale-house, and you're over old to be courting-daft—"

"Not so old, my lass," he broke in, with the heat she had tempted from him. "I should know, at my age, how to court a woman."

"I believe you do, Simon—if nobbut you'd try your hand, like."

"Lads go daft about ye women—think ye're all made up of buttercups and kiss-me-quicks. But I know different."

"Oh, ay?" asked Martha gently. "What d'ye know, Simon?"

"Naught so much, lass—only that women are like nettles. Handle 'em tenderly, and they'll gi'e ye a rash ye can feel for a week o' days. But grasp 'em—and they're soft as lettuces."

"I allus did say older men had more sense than lads. You're right, Simon. Grasp us—"

"Ay, another day," said Simon—bluntly, and with a hint of fear. "For my part, I'm too full o' Sir Jasper's business to heed any sort o' moonshine."

He was half up the road already, but she enticed him back.

"These men you saw riding in the sky, Simon? You've frightened me—and I was allus feared o' ghosties."

Simon, though he would not admit it, was troubled by the picture he had seen, up yonder on the moors; and, after the human fashion, he was willing to share his trouble with another.

"Well, I saw 'em—no denying that," he said, returning slowly. "There were two riding at the front—like as it might have been Sir Jasper and Squire Demaine—and a lot o' horsemen scampering after. There was thick haze all across the sky, and I saw 'em like a picture in a printed book. I'd have thought less about it, Martha, if it hadn't been that Maister Rupert—the day, ye mind, he came home from fighting his brother—told me how, that varry morn, he'd seen the like pic-

ture up above his head—just horsemen, he said, galloping up and down where honest sky should be."

"Ben o' the stables war talking of it awhile since, now I call to mind. One here and there had seen the same sort o' picture, he said; but I paid no heed. Ben was allus light and feather-brained—not steady, Simon, like ye."

Her glance was tender, frank, dismaying; and Simon answered it with a slow, foolish smile. "Steady is as steady does. For my part—what wi' rheumatiz, and seeing other folk get all the fighting, and me left at home—ye could mak a bit of a lile fool o' me, Martha, I do believe. Ye're so bonnie, like——"

"No harm i' that, is there?"

"Well, not just what ye'd call harm—not exactly harm—but my day's over, lass."

"That's what the rooster said when he war moulting, Simon; but he lived to crow another day."

Simon had learned from the far-off days of soldiering that there are times when the bravest are counselled to retreat in good order. "Well, I'm i' the moult just now," he said impassively, "and it's time I gat into th' house, now they're made me some queer sort of indoor servant. Lady Royd will be wanting this and that—ye know her pretty-prat way, needing fifty things i' a minute."

"But, Simon——"

He trudged steadily forward, not turning his head; and Martha sighed as she climbed the gate again and began to rock gently to and fro. "Men are kittlesome cattle," she said discontentedly.

Round the bend of the road below she heard the sound of footsteps—halting steps that now and then ceased for a while. She forgot Simon, forgot her peevishness, as she saw the figure that came up the road towards her. All the motherhood that was strong and eager in this lass came to the front as she saw Rupert, the heir—Rupert, who had been missing since the dawn—come home in this derelict, queer fashion.

She ran out and put an arm about him. He was not the heir now, the master left in charge of Windyhough; he was the lad whose cries she had helped to still, long since in nursery days.

"Why, sir, ye're i' th' wars, and proper. You're limping sorely."

Rupert steadied himself against her arm for a moment, then put her away and went forward. "Nay, I'm out of the wars, Martha," he said, with the rare smile that made friends among those who chanced to see it. "I'm out of the wars—and that's my trouble."

"But you're limping——"

"Yes," he snapped, with sudden loss of temper. "I'm limping, Martha—since my birth. That's no news to me."

He went in at the door of Windyhough, and in the hall encountered Lady Royd. The light was dim here, and she did not see his weariness.

"Where have you been, Rupert?" she asked peevishly.

He kissed her lightly on the cheek. "I've been up the moors, mother," he said, "planning how best to defend Windyhough if the attack should come." He was here to take up the post allotted to him, and to his last ebb of strength he meant to be debonair and cheery, as his father would have been under like hardship. "There are so few men left here, and all of us are either old, or—or useless," he added, with his whimsical, quiet smile.

Lady Royd, oppressed by loneliness, swept out of her self-love by the storm of this Loyal Meet that had left her in its wake, stood near to the life which is known to workaday folk—the life made up of sleet and a little sun, of work and the need for faith and courage. She looked at her boy, trying to read his face in the dull, uncertain light; and her heart ached for him.

"But, Rupert," she said by and by, "there's no fear of attack. The march has gone south—the fighting will be there, not here—you overheard your father say as much."

He winced, remembering the eagerness with which he had

followed Sir Jasper round the house, the pride he had felt in noting each loophole, the muskets, and the piles of shot entrusted to his care. He recalled, with minute and pitiful exactness, how afterwards he had been an unwilling listener while his father said it had been all a fairy-tale to lull his elder-born to sleep.

"My father said it was child's-play," he answered quietly. "Yes, I'm not likely to forget just what he said—and what he left unsaid. But, mother, the storm might blow this way again, and I'm here to guard you, as I promised."

The day was no easy one for Rupert, accustomed from childhood to find himself in the rear of action. Yet it was harder to Lady Royd, who had known little discipline till now, who looked at this son who was counted scholarly, and, with eyes accustomed to the dim light of the hall, saw at last the stubborn manhood in his face.

"I did not guess," she said, her voice gentle, wondering, submissive—"Rupert, I did not guess till now why your father was always so full of trust in you."

His eyes brightened. He had expected a colder welcome from this pretty, sharp-tongued mother. It seemed, after all, he had done well to return to his post at Windyhough. His thoughts ran forward, like a pack in full cry. The battle might shift north again—there might be some hot skirmish in the open, or the need to protect fugitives at Windyhough—or twenty pleasant happenings that would give him escape from idle sentry-duty here. Rupert was at his dreams again. An hour since he had dragged himself along the road, sick at heart, sick of body, disillusioned altogether; and now he was eager with forward hope because Lady Royd, from the pain of her own trouble, had found one swift word of encouragement. Encouragement had been rare in the lad's life, and he found it a fine stimulant—too fine a one for his present needs. He moved quickly forward. His damaged foot bent under him, and for a moment the pain made him wince.

"It is nothing, mother," he said, dropping on to the settle

and looking up with the quiet smile that haunted her. "I'm tired and wet—wet through to the heart, I think—let me get up and help you."

She did not know what to do with this son, who was growing dearer to her each moment. Shut off from real life too long, she had no skill such as workaday mothers would have learned by now, and she called shrilly for the servants.

A big man, bent in the body, made his way forward presently through the women, pushing them aside as if he picked his way through useless lumber. It was Simon Foster, who had grown used, in the far-off '15 Rising, to the handling of wounded men.

"A baddish sprain—no more, no less," he growled, after he had taken off boot and stocking and looked at the swollen ankle.

"Oh, the poor lad!" cried Lady Royd, fidgety and useless. "Go, one of you, for the surgeon——"

"There's no need, my lady," broke in Simon Foster. He had forgotten the manners of a trained servant, and was back again in the happy days when he had carried a pike for the Cause and did not know it lost. "I've mended worse matters than this in my time. You, Martha, get bandages. They're somewhere handy—we brought plenty in at haytime, along with the powder-kegs."

Lady Royd did not rebuke him. Martha, who not long since had tempted him to folly, went off submissively to do his bidding. It seemed natural to these women that a man should be in command—a man who knew his mind and did not turn aside.

"There," said Simon, after he had strapped the ankle. "It will bother ye a while, master, but there's a lot o' time for rest these days at Windyhough. Let me gi'e ye an arm up the stair. Ye'd best get to bed, I reckon."

Nance Demaine had kept to her room this morning. They had brought her to Windyhough, had taken her mare, had left her derelict in a house that harboured only memories of past

deeds. The active men were gone; the mettled horses were gone; she was bidden to keep within four walls, and wait, and pray. And she wished neither to pray nor to be stifled by four house-walls; she longed to be out in the open country, following the open road that had led to her heart's desire. Tired of her own thoughts at last, she went out on to the landing, with a restless sense that duty was calling her below-stairs; but she got no farther than the window that looked on a stormy sweep of moorland.

Nance was in a bitter mood, as she sat in the window-seat and watched the white, lifeless hills, the sodden fields. Squire Demaine had trained her to love of galloping and loyalty, had taught her that England's one, prime need was to see a Stuart on the throne again; and now, when deeds were asked of men and women both, he had left her here, to weave samplers, or to help Lady Royd brew simples in the stillroom, while they waited for their men to come home from the slaying.

There was Will Underwood, too. With the obstinacy that attaches to a girl's first love, she was warm in defence of him against the men who had liked him—some few of them—but had never trusted him. He had not come to claim her kerchief. Well, he would claim it another day; he had his own reasons, doubtless, for joining the Meet farther south. Some urgent message had reached him—from the Prince himself, may be—bidding him ride out on an errand of especial danger. No surmise was too wild to find acceptance. He was so strong, so graceful and well-favoured; he sat his horse so well, courted risks which prudent riders declined. It was fitting that he should be chosen for some post demanding gaiety, a firm seat in saddle, and reckless courage.

Nance, for all the sleetly outlook, was seeing this Rising again as a warm, impulsive drama. She had watched Sir Jasper and her father ride out, had been chilled by their simple gravity; but she had forgotten the lesson already, in her girl's need for the alluring and the picturesque. This love of hers

for Underwood was an answer to the like need. At all hazards she must have warmth and colour, to feed her young, impulsive dreams of a world built in the midst of fairyland. She could not know, just yet, that the true warmth, the true, vivid colours come to those who, not concerned with the fairyland of make-believe, ride leal and trusty through the wind that stings their faces, over the sloppy, ill-found roads that spatter them with mud.

She was desolate, this child who sat in the window-seat and constructed all afresh the picture of her hero-lover. She was weaving one of the samplers she despised, after all—not with wool and canvas, but in fancy's loom. Obstinate in her demand for vivid drama, she was following Will Underwood already on this errand that the Prince had entrusted to his care. She saw him riding through the dangerous night roads, and prayed for his safety, at each corner of a highway peopled with assassins. She saw him galloping recklessly in open daylight, meeting odds laughable in their overwhelming number, killing his men, not singly but by scores, as he rode on, untouched, and gay, and loyal to his trust. It is so that young love is apt to make its idol a knight miraculous, moving through a cloud-land too ethereal for the needs of each day as it comes. Nance Demaine could hold her own in the open country; but here, shut in by the walls of a house that was old and dumb, waiting for the men's return, she reached out for Will Underwood's help, and needed him—or needed the untried, easy air of romance that he carried with him.

She got up from the window-seat at last. The sleet and the piping wind wearied her. She was tired already of inaction, ashamed of the thoughts that could not keep away from pictures of Will Underwood, riding on the Prince's service. She remembered that she was a guest here, that she must get away from her dreams as best she might.

"I must go down," she said fretfully. "Lady Royd will be needing me. And she'll take my hands, and cry a little, and ask me, 'Will Sir Jasper live?' And then she'll kiss me, and

cry again, and ask, ‘Will Sir Jasper die?’ Oh, I know it all beforehand! But I must go down.”

Even now she could not bring herself to the effort. She paced up and down the floor of her bedchamber. Disdain of her position here, intemperate dislike of weaklings, the longing to be out and about under the free sky, were overwhelming in their call to this child who needed discipline. And, though she was Squire Demaine’s child, she resented this first, drab-coloured call of duty.

She braced herself to the effort. But she was bitter still, and some remembrance of her father’s teaching took her unawares. “Lady Royd comes from the south country, where they killed a Royal Stuart once,” she muttered. “She does not know—she cannot even learn—our northern ways. Sir Jasper lives or dies—but either way he lives. She does not know that either way he *lives*—as we count life up here.”

Nance was shaken by the passion known to women who have seen their men go out to war—the passion that finds no outlet in hard give-and-take—the desperate, keen heartache that is left to feed upon itself.

“I must go down,” she said, as if repeating a lesson hard to learn.

As she opened the door and crossed the landing, she heard a heavy footfall on the stair below, then Simon Foster’s laboured breathing. Some instinct of disaster chilled her. In this house of emptiness, with the wind roaming like an unquiet ghost down every corridor, she listened to the uncanny, stealthy up-coming. Once, years ago, she had heard men bringing home her brother, killed in the hunting-field; and it seemed to her that she was listening to the same sounds again, was feeling the same vague, unreasoning dread. Then she remembered that Rupert had been missing since dawn, and she was moved by some grief that struck deeper than she understood.

They turned the corner of the stair at last, and Nance saw Rupert coming up—Rupert, his face grey and tired as he leaned on Simon’s arm; Rupert, who looked older, manlier,

more like Sir Jasper. And then, for no reason she could have given, she lost half her grief. At least he was not dead; and there was a look about him which stronger men of her acquaintance had worn when they were in the thick of trouble.

There was a long, mullioned window lighting the stairway head. And Rupert, looking up, saw Nance standing there—close to him, yet far away as some lady of dreams might stand. The keen winter's sun, getting out from sleet-clouds, made a St. Luke's summer round about her; and Nance, who was just comely, good to see, at other times, borrowed a strange beauty from the hour and place, and from the humanity that was troubling her.

Rupert halted on the landing, and looked at her as if she were food and drink to him. Then he flushed, and turned his head.

"You?" he said quietly. "I'd rather have met any one but you just now."

"And why, my dear?" asked Nance, with simple tenderness.

"Why? Because I'm maimed, and sick at heart," he said savagely.

"How did it come about?" she interrupted, with the same impulsive tenderness.

"I tried to join the Rising, and was thrown. So much was to be expected, Nance?"

She had been thinking hard things of stay-at-homes and weaklings; and, as she looked at Rupert now, she was touched by keen reproach. He was ashamed, tired out, in pain of soul and body; yet he was smiling, was making a jest of his indifferent horsemanship.

Nance recalled once more that evening on the moors, when Rupert had bidden Will Underwood ride with her to Windy-hough, while he stayed with his brother. In his voice, in the set of his whole face, there had been a stubborn strength that had astonished her; and here again, on the sunlit, draughty stairhead, he was showing her a glimpse of his true self.

"I wish you better luck," she said simply—"oh, so much better luck."

He saw that there were tears in her eyes, and felt his weakness coming on him like a cloud, and fought it for a moment longer.

"It will come, Nance," he said—cheerily, though he felt himself a liar. "Go down to mother. She—she needs help more than I. Now, Simon, you've got your breath again."

"Ay, maister—as mich as I shall ever get, as the short-winded horse said when they asked him why he roared like a smithy-bellows."

"Then I'll go forward"—again the keen, bitter smile—"to the lumber-room, Simon, among the broken odds and ends."

Nance stood aside, finding no words to help herself or him, and watched them go along the corridor, and in at the door of Rupert's bedchamber. And she knew, beyond doubt or surmise, that the Loyal Meet had left one useful volunteer at home to-day.

She found Lady Royd in the low-raftered parlour that always carried an air of luxury and ease. In summer it was heavy with the scent of garden flowers; and now there was a tired, luxurious appeal from bowls of faded rose-leaves set everywhere about the room. A fire, too big for the comfort of open-air folk, was crackling on the hearth. In all things this parlour was a dainty frame enough for the mistress whose beauty had been nipped, not strengthened, by the keen winds of Lancashire.

"Nance, will he live?" asked Lady Royd, running forward with the outstretched hands, the very words, that she had looked for. But she spoke of Rupert, not of Sir Jasper. "He came home so wearied-out—so lame and grey of face—"

"Oh, I met him on the stairhead just now," broke in Nance, with sharp common sense. "He's had a fall from his horse—and he made a jest of it—and that is all."

"Then he'll not die, you think? Nance, tell me, he'll not

die. I've been unkind to him in days past, and I—I am sorry."

It seemed to Nance that in this house of Windyhough she was never to escape from pity, from the sharper, clearer insight into life that these hopeless days were teaching her. This pretty matron, whom her husband had spoiled, sheltering her from draughts as if she were a hothouse flower too rare to take her chance in the open border—she was foolish as of old, so far as speech and manner went. But in her face, in her lisping, childish voice, there was a new, strong appeal that touched the younger woman.

"I think that he—will *live*," said the girl, with sudden passion. "He's here among the women now—but to-morrow—or the next day, or the next—he'll prove himself."

Lady Royd moved aimlessly about the room, warmed her hands at the fire, shivered as she glanced at the wintry sunlight out of doors. Then she came close to Nance, as if asking protection of some kind. "You hold the Faith, child. I do not," she said, with bewildering candour.

"But, Lady Royd—indeed, we're of the same Faith——"

"Yes, in the open shows, when folk are looking on. I'd as lief go abroad without my gown as not be seen at Mass. It is asked of Sir Jasper's wife; so is constancy to the yellow-haired laddie who has sent sober men astray. Veiled lids are asked for when Will Underwood makes pretty speeches, with his eyes on fire; but at my heart, child—at my heart I've faith only in each day's ease as it comes."

"Mr. Underwood has gone to the wars," broke in Nance, with an odd sense of misery and an obstinate contempt, for all that, of this woman's prattling. "He'll come back in his own time, Lady Royd, after the King is on his throne again."

"But *has* he gone to the wars? I missed him among our friends to-day."

"Because he has ridden on a private errand of the Prince's." Nance was reckless in her protection of Will's honour. "He

was the likeliest rider of them all to be chosen for such service."

"Oh, there! And I hoped he would be wise, and stay at home, and ride over now and then to cheer us with his pleasant face." Her smile was frail and listless, with a certain youthful archness in it that drew men to her side; but its appeal was lost on Nance. "Of course, I am loyal to Sir Jasper—and I shall cry each night till he returns—but Will's homage is charming, Nance. It is so delicate, child—a word here, and a glance there—that one forgets one is middle-aged. He spent some years in Paris, they say—to escape from his father's money-making and from the bleak chapel on the hill—and I can well believe it. The French have that gift of suggesting a grand passion, when neither actor in the comedy believes a word of it."

Nance moved away, and looked out at the sunlight and the sleetish hills. So strong, so impulsive, was her resistance to Sir Jasper's wife that even the "bleak chapel on the hill"—she knew it well, a four-square, dowdy little building not far from her own home—took on an unsuspected strength and dignity. It was reared out of moor-stone, at least—reared by stubborn, if misguided, folk who were bred on the same uplands as herself. Will Underwood had learned follies in Paris, undoubtedly; but, if her liking for him, her care for his honour, had any meaning, it rested on the faith that he had outgrown these early weaknesses, that he was English to the core. He could ride straight—there was something pathetic in her clinging to this one, outstanding virtue—he was known among men to be fearless, strong in all field sports; he had endurance and a liking for the open air. And Lady Royd, in her vague, heedless way, had painted him as a parlour lapdog, who could while a pleasant hour away for women who lived in overheated rooms.

Nance was obstinate in her loyalty to friends; yet she remembered now stray hints, odds and ends of scandal passed between the women after dinner, while they waited for the

men to join them; and all had been agreed that Will Underwood had the gift of making the last woman who engaged his ardour believe she was the first.

Lady Royd warmed her hands at the fire again, and laughed gently. "Why, child, you're half in love with him, like the rest of us. I know it by your silence."

And Nance, whose good-humour was a byword among her intimates, found her temper snap, like any common, ill-forged sword might do. "By your leave," she said, "I never did anything by halves. My friends are my friends. I'm loyal, Lady Royd."

"Yes, yes—and I—am middle-aged, my dear, and the fire grows cold already."

There was appeal in the older woman's voice. She needed the girl's strength, her windy, moor-swept grasp of the big hills and the bigger faith. But Nance was full of her own troubles, and would not heed.

"There are dogs left at Windyhough?" she said, moving to the door. "Well, then, let me take them for a scamper. I cannot stay in prison, Lady Royd."

Nance swept out of the parlour, with its faded scent of rose-leaves, donned hat and cloak, and went out in hot rebellion to cool her fever in the nipping wind. She did not guess how she was needed by this frail, discontented woman she had left indoors.

Lady Royd, indeed, was human—no more, no less. She could not escape in a moment from the spoiled, settled habits of a lifetime. Sir Jasper had ridden out, and the misery of it had been sudden, agonising. Rupert had blundered home, in his derelict way, with a sprained ankle and a face as white as the hills he loved; and the motherhood in her, untrained, suppressed, had cut through her like a knife. All was desolation here; and she thought of her homeland—of the south country, where winds blew soft and quiet, and lilac bloomed before the leaf-buds had well broken here in Lancashire—and she was hidden by a mist of desperate self-pity.

Like Rupert, when he found himself lying in the mud of Langton Road not long ago and heard his horse go galloping down the wind, she thought of death as an easy pathway of escape. Like Rupert, she was not needed here. She was not of the breed that rides out, easy in saddle, on such heroic, foolish errands as Sir Jasper coveted. And yet, when she came to face the matter, she had not courage, either, to die and venture into the cold unknown beyond.

She had talked of Will Underwood, of his easy gallantry, and Nance had thought her heartless; yet she had sought only a refuge from the stress of feeling that was too hard for her to bear.

She moved up and down the parlour, in her haphazard, useless way. Her husband had ridden out on a venture high and dangerous; and she was setting a cushion to rights here, smoothing the fold of a curtain there, with the intentness of a kitten that sees no farther than its playthings. But under all there was a fierce, insistent heartache, a rebellion against the weakness that hindered her. She began to think of Rupert, to understand, little by little, how near together they were, he and she. Her cowardice seemed lifted away by friendly hands, as she told herself that she would go up and sit at the lad's bedside. She had known him too little in years past; there was time now to repair mistakes.

Simon Foster was watching the master, as he lay in that sleep of sheer exhaustion, following long effort and self-doubt, which was giving him strength and respite before the morrow needed him. Simon heard a low tapping at the door, opened it, saw Lady Royd standing on the threshold.

"Is he asking for me?" she said diffidently.

"No, my lady. He's asking for twelve hours o' sleep—and he'll get them, if I've any say i' the matter."

"But you'll be tired, Simon, and I—I am wide awake. Let me sit by him——"

"You're kind," he interrupted bluntly; "but I'm watchdog

here, by your leave. It happens to be war, not peace—and no offence, my lady."

She turned, aware that a man was in command here; and Simon was left to his interrupted musings.

"By the Heart," he growled, "if only he could find his way! He's lean and weak; but the lad's keen, hard-bitten pluck—it's killing him before his time, it is. He can find no outlet for it, like."

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROAD TO THE THRONE

SIR JASPER, riding sometimes at the head of his men, at others near the Prince, had little time for backward thoughts during this surprising march. Each day was full of peril; but each day, too, was full of chance humours of the road, of those odds and ends of traffic by the way which turn men's thoughts from a too deep, unpractical thinking of the high Cause only to the means by which step by step, it is to be attained.

In full truth they were following the open road, these gentry of the Prince's. Marshal Wade was blundering down from the north to take them in the rear. The Duke of Cumberland was waiting for them somewhere round about the Stafford country. They rode through villages and towns that were not hostile—hostility is a nettle to grasp and have done with it—but indifferent or afraid. Throughout this cold and sloppy march, wet through, with the keen wind piping through their sodden clothes, the greatest hardship that met them was the lack of fierce and stubborn fight.

The Highlanders grew tired and listless, and Prince Charles, who knew their temper to a nicety, for it was his own, was forced at last to bid the pipers cease playing reels and strathspeys down the road.

"With all submission, your Highness," said Lord Murray petulantly, riding to his side as they marched out of Lancaster, "I would ask your reason. The pipers not to play? It is all the comfort these Highlanders can find in England here."

Sir Jasper, riding near, saw the Prince turn, with that quick, hardly restrained impatience which Murray's presence always caused. "I gave the order," he answered, with deliberate

calm, "because I know your Highlanders—I, who was bred in France—better than their leaders. Give me an army in front, my lord Murray, give me Wade, or Cumberland, or the Elector, barring the road ahead, and the pipes shall sing, I promise you."

Then suddenly he threw his head up. His face, grown old and tired, furrowed by sleepless care for his five thousand men, was young again. He was seeing far ahead, beyond the mud and jealousies of these wintry English roads. And again Sir Jasper understood why the women up in Edinburgh had gone mad about this Stuart with the yellow hair. The decent women love a fighter always—a fighter for some cause that is big and selfless; and the Prince's face, just now, was lit by some glow from the wider hills.

"The pipes shall sing," he went on, his voice deep, tender, hurried. "They'll play like quicksilver, Lord Murray, when—when the Hanover men care to meet us in the open."

"But meanwhile, your Highness, we've to trudge on, and I say you're forbidding meat and drink to your troops when you'll not let them hear the pipes."

Sir Jasper moved his horse forward. They were alone, the three of them, a furlong ahead of the army. Lord Murray's tone was so bitter, so like a scolding woman's that Sir Jasper's instinct was to intervene, to take the quarrel on his own shoulders and settle it, here by the wayside, in the honest Lancashire way. He was checked by the Prince himself, who returned from the hills of dreams with surprising quickness.

"We've to trudge on," he said, with workaday grasp of the affairs in hand. "You find the exact word, Lord Murray, as your habit is. What use, then, to let the pipes go singing music into men's feet? We have to *trudge*."

Murray, dour, unimaginative, possessed by a fever of jealousy which would not let him rest, was scarcely civil. And manners, after all, are the outward sign of character. "Your Highness issues commands, and we obey——"

"Why, yes. I came from France to issue them," broke in the other, with a disdain that was royal in its quietness.

Sir Jasper thought of his windy house in Lancashire, of the dreams he had fed upon, of the long preparation for this march that was to light England with loyal fires. And he was here, riding at a footpace through the dreary roads, watching the rift widen between the Prince and Murray. He was oppressed by some omen of the days to come, or by the sadness of the Highlanders, who sought a fight and could not find it. He had dreamed of an army—loyal, compact, looking neither to left nor right—that would march, at speed and with a single purpose, on London, an army that would not rest until it drove the Hanoverian abroad. Instead, there were divided counsels, a landscape dreary and rain-shrouded, and Murray for ever at their elbows, sowing doubt and dull suspicion.

"Your Highness," said Sir Jasper, all in his quick, hill-bred way, "we seem to be riding on a Lenten penance, and Christmas is six weeks off as yet. Surely Lord Murray would be well quit of his dourness."

The Prince turned in saddle. "My thanks, Sir Jasper," he said, with an easy laugh. "Lord Murray has never kept a Lenten fast—it smacks too much of superstition, he says; but, by the God we serve, Sir Jasper, he would likely be the better for it."

So then Murray, seeing two against him and not relishing the odds, lost his temper outright. "Superstition does not carry armies on to victory," he snapped.

"No," assented the Prince, as if he reckoned up a sum in simple addition. "But faith, my lord Murray—it carries men far and happily."

Murray checked himself with obvious effort, and they rode on in silence for a while. "Your Highness, I spoke hastily just now," he said by and by. His voice, try as he would, had no warmth in it, no true sincerity. "I ask your pardon."

"Oh, that is granted. Our royal purse is empty, but we can still be spendthrift with forgiveness."

Again Sir Jasper glanced at this many-sided Prince of his. The smile, the grave rebuke hidden beneath gentlest courtesy, were not his own; they were gifts entrusted to his keeping by many generations of the Stuart race. They had not always done well or wisely, these Stuarts; but wherever down the track of history they had touched a world made dull and ugly by the men who lived in it, they had stood always for the buoyant faith, the clean and eager hope, the royal breadth of sympathy that sweeps shams and make-believes aside.

Sir Jasper, riding through this wet, unlovely country, found himself once more in that mood of tenderness, of wrath and pity, which had surprised him not long ago in Langton High Street. The islanders of Skye—Skye, in the misty Highland country—had known this mood from birth and were accustomed to it, as they were used to the daily labour to win bread, from land or sea, for their wives and bairns. But Sir Jasper was young to it, and was disturbed by the simple, tragic pity that seemed to cling about the Stuart—a something filmy and impalpable, as if with him always there rode a phantom shape of martyrdom to come.

He sought relief in action, glanced up and down the highway in hope of straightforward, healthy battle. But Marshal Wade was a good three days' march in the rear, and the Duke of Cumberland was playing hide-and-seek along the Staffordshire lanes without success.

Sir Jasper turned from looking up and down the road, and saw Lord Murray riding close on his right. The man's face was set and hard; and Sir Jasper, with the intuition that comes to tired and heartsick men, knew that the enemy was here among them—not in the shape of an army challenging endeavour, but of one cautious Scotsman who was busy saving halfpennies while guineas were going down the wind.

As if to prove Sir Jasper's judgment accurate, Lord Murray broke the silence. "You spoke of faith just now, your Highness," he said.

"Why, yes—because you asked it of me. One seldom speaks of such matters unless compelled."

"Then, with all submission, I say that faith is for kirk on Sabbaths, for the quietness of a man's bedchamber; but we're here in open war. War—I've seen it overseas, and have been wounded twice—is a cold, practical affair, your Highness."

So then the Prince glanced at Sir Jasper and laughed outright, and after that was silent for a while. "My lord Murray," he said quietly, "faith, mine and Sir Jasper's, goes into battle with us, goes into every road we take. I'm ashamed, somehow, to speak so plainly of—of what I know."

"May I speak of what I, too, know?" put in Murray sharply. "It is of war I speak, your Highness. I know the rules of it—know that this hurried march of ours through England can end only in disaster. Retreat in good order, even now, is our only course—retreat to Scotland, where we can gather in the clans that were slow to join us—"

"Retreat?" said the Prince, his head lifted suddenly, his voice ringing with command and challenge. "I never learned the word, at school or afterwards. Retreat? My lord Murray, there's only one plain rule of war—to ride forward, and plant your blow where the first opportunity serves."

"That is our rule in Lancashire," put in Sir Jasper dryly.

Murray glanced at the two of them. He had hoped much from the cold logic that guided his days for him, had been sure that he could persuade the Prince to his own view of the campaign; and these two, resolute in faith and almost gay, were treating him as if he were a stripling with much to learn in life beyond the rules of war and mathematics.

"I say, your Highness, that we've hardened troops against us, officered by men who have grown old in strategy—"

"And yet we're here in spite of them, right through the northern counties, and likely to keep Christmas in London. We're here, my lord Murray, because zeal laughs at strategy."

"For all that," put in Murray dryly, "you'll not let the pipes

be played. They, surely, are musical with faith—your own sort of faith, that bids men forget calculation and all else."

Again the Prince moved impatiently in saddle. "I am not used to give reasons for my conduct, but you shall have them now, since you persist. My Highlanders, they take a dram to whet their appetite for meals; but if there's no meal waiting, why, my lord Murray, it is idle to offer them the dram."

"There's no fight near at hand, you mean? Your Highness, there are three big battles that I know of—and others, it may be—waiting close about us on this road to London. Give the Highlanders their pipes again. Their appetite needs sharpening if you persist in going forward."

The Prince glanced at Sir Jasper. "We go forward, I think?" he asked, with a whimsical, quick smile.

"That is our errand," Sir Jasper answered simply.

"Then, Lord Murray, ride back and bid the pipers play their fill. And I pray that one of your three phantom armies waiting for us on the London road may prove flesh and blood."

Murray was exact in his calculations. He was not greatly moved by the bagpipes, for his own part, but he knew that they were as necessary as food and drink to the Highlanders, who were the nerve and soul of this army following the forlornest hope. He turned his horse and galloped back.

And presently the footmen's march grew brisker; jaded riders felt their nags move less dispiritedly under them.

The pipes were singing, low at first, as if a mother crooned to her child up yonder in the misty Highlands. And then the music and the magic grew, till it seemed that windy March was striding, long and sinewy of limb, across the land of lengthening days and rising sap and mating beasts and birds. And then, again, there was a warmth and haste in the music, a sudden wildness and a tender pity, that seemed like April ushering in her broods along the nestling hedgerows, the fields where lambs were playing, the banks that were gold with primroses, and budding speedwell, and strong, young

growth of greenstuff. And then, again, from the rear of this tattered army that marched south to win a kingdom for the Stuart, full June was playing round about this wet and dismal Stafford country. The Prince knew it; Sir Jasper knew it. Even Lord Murray, riding far behind was aware that life held more than strategy and halfpennies.

"Dear God, the pipes!" said the Prince, turning suddenly. "D'ye hear them, Sir Jasper?"

"I'm hill-bred, too, your Highness. Could I miss their note?"

And they fell silent, for there is something in this hill music that touches the soul of a man. It finds out his need of battle, his instinct to be up and doing along the wide, human thoroughfares of life. And then it stifles him with pity, with homesickness and longing for the wife and bairns who, for all that, would not approve him if he failed to take the road. And then, again, it sounds the fighting note, till every fibre responds to the call for instant action.

No action met them. They rode forward through the driving wind, the Prince and Sir Jasper; and now the pipes, hurried and unwearyed, played only mockery about them, rousing their strength while denying it an outlet.

It was then Sir Jasper heard the first and last bitter word from the leader who had summoned him to this drear adventure. "The pity of it!" said the Prince. "I ask only a free hand, and they'll not give it me. Sir Jasper, what is amiss with Lord Murray? There was something left out of him at birth, I think—soul, or heart—or what you choose to name it. This march of ours—he will not listen when I tell him it is bigger than the strict rules of warfare."

Sir Jasper reined near and put a hand on the Prince's bridle-arm, as a father might who sees his boy attempting more than his strength warrants. "I understand," he said simply. "By your leave, I'll play watchdog to Murray till we reach London. He stands for caution, and I"—a sudden remembrance came to him of Windyhough, of the

wife and heir, and his loneliness bit so deep that, for shame's sake, he had to cover up his grief—"and I, your Highness," he added, with a touch of humour, "have been blamed for many things, but never yet for caution."

"No, no. We might be old in friendship, you and I. We see the like world, Sir Jasper—the world that caution is too mean to enter. And yet my lord Murray—who has been bred among the hills, while I have not—has never learned their teaching, as I learned it at my first coming to the misty Highlands."

The pipes would not be quiet, behind them on this sloppy road. The Prince, as his habit was, had seen far and wisely when he forbade the music. To and fro the uproar went, wild, insistent, friendly as the cry of moor-birds—snipe and curlew and wide-roving plover—to men who love the uplands. The music lacked its fulness, for in these Midlands there were no mountains to echo it, to pass it on from rise to rise, till it grew faint and elfin-like among the blue moor-tops; but even here the pipes were swift and tender with persuasion.

"All this, Sir Jasper," the Prince said by and by—"the pipes playing fury into us, and in front of us the empty road. Murray promised us three battles at the least, and we're here like soldiers on parade."

Sir Jasper had cherished dreams of this Rising, but war, in the hot fighting and in the dreary silences between, is not made up of dreams. The poetry of it comes before and after, when peace smooths her ruffled plumage and sings of heroism; the prose of it is so commonplace that men sensitively built need dogged loyalty to keep them safe from disillusionment.

"The wind blows east, your Highness," he said. "You'll pardon me, but an east wind sets my temper all on edge. My sympathy is catholic, but I'd hang the nether millstone round Lord Murray's neck if I had my way."

The Prince glanced behind, because the pipes were tired of

battle now, and were crooning lullabies—the strong, tender cradle-songs that Highland mothers know. "No," he said quietly. "We share the same desire, but we'd relent."

"Not I, for one."

"Yes, you, for one, and I, for one, because we're human. So few of your English folk are human, somehow, as I've seen them since my Highlanders crossed Annan River. They're ill-clad, these Highland lads of mine, and raw to look at, but they carry the ready heart, Sir Jasper, and the simple creed—you can bend them till point meets hilt, like a Ferrara blade, and yet not break them."

"We are tempered steel in Lancashire, your Highness," said Sir Jasper, in passionate defence of his county. "Few of us have come to the Rising, but I can answer for each man of mine that follows you."

"I was hasty; the pipes play that mood into a man. When we planned this Rising, years ago in France, the King—my father—bade me remember always that Lancashire was staunch and its women beautiful. The east wind must be excuse for me, too, Sir Jasper."

"Your Highness, I spoke hastily. My temper, I tell you, is frayed at the edges by winter and harsh weather."

"I like your temper well enough, Sir Jasper. Let's take a pinch of snuff together, since there's nothing else to do."

It was in this mood that they rode into a little village clustered round a stream. The hamlet was so small that the crowd of men and women gathered round about the ford seemed bigger than its numbers. The villagers, enticed by the news that the Rising neared their borders, raised a sudden tumult when they saw the van of the army ride into sight. Curiosity held them, while fear and all the rumours they had heard prompted them to instant flight. Mothers clutched their babies, and turned as if to run for shelter, then turned again and halted between two minds, and must needs stay to see what these queer Highlanders were like. The younger women, glad of this respite from the day's routine, ogled the

Prince and Sir Jasper with unaffected candour. The men looked on sheepishly, afraid for their own safety, but not content to leave their women in the lurch.

"Here's the cannibals from Scotland!" cried one big, shrill-voiced woman. "They feed on English babies, so we're told. Dear mercy, I hope they've had their breakfast earlier on the road!"

The Prince checked his horse suddenly. His face was flushed, ashamed, as if a blow had struck him on the cheek. "My good woman," he said, bending from saddle to look into her plump, foolish face, "have they lied so deep to you as that?"

"Lies? Nay, I know what I'm talking about, or should do at my years. There've been well-spoken gentry in and out these weeks past, and they all had the same tale; so it stands to reason the tale was true as Candlemas." She set her arms akimbo. The quietness of this horseman who talked to her, his good looks and subtle air of breeding, had killed her terror and given her instead a bravado no less foolish. "Thou'rt well enough to look at, lad, and I wish I was younger, I do, to kiss ye on the sly when my man didn't happen to be looking; but the rest o' ye, coming down the road, ye're as ragged a lot o' trampish folk as I've set eyes on."

The Prince laughed, not happily, but as if the pipes were bidding him weep instead. Then he plucked his mare forward—Nance Demaine's mare, which he had borrowed—and splashed through the ford. And it was not till the hamlet was a mile behind him that he turned to Sir Jasper.

"A lie chills me," he said abruptly; "especially a lie that is foisted on poor, unlettered folk. They told me this and that, Sir Jasper, of Hanoverian methods, and I—what shall I say?—*disdained*, I think, to believe it of an enemy. They will not fight us in the open since we worsted them at Prestonpans, but instead they send 'well-spoken gentry' to honeycomb the countryside with lies."

Sir Jasper, the more he followed the open road with this

comrade in adversity, found ever and ever a deeper liking for him. He could be ashamed, this Stuart whom women had done their best to spoil in Scotland—could be ashamed because his Highlanders were slighted; could stand apart from his own danger and weariness, and grow hot with punctilious care for the honour of the men who followed him. And the older man thought no longer of Windyhough, of ties that had not been sundered lightly; he was content to be in company with one who, by instinct and by training, was a leader of the true royal fibre.

The Prince was glancing straight ahead as they jogged forward, and in his eyes was the look which moorland folk know as "seeing far."

"My Highlanders are cannibals?" he said, not turning his head, seeming to need no listener, or to have forgotten that he rode in company. "The men I've learned to know by heart during these last wintry months—is that their reputation?"

"It was a silly woman's gibe, your Highness," put in the other, with blunt common sense. "Surely you're not moved by it?"

"It was more. They have been sending paid liars up and down the length of this road to London—have fouled the going for us. I tell you, Sir Jasper, that lies make me sick at heart. I tell you an enemy that will go so far in cowardice will afterwards do anything, I think—kill wounded men as they lie helpless on the battlefield—"

"No, no, your Highness! With all submission, your anger carries you away."

"I am not angry—only tired and sick at heart, and seeing far ahead. I say that I am seeing it—a bleak moor in the Highland country, and men lying on the ground, and a rough bullock of a man shouting, 'Kill these wounded rascals; put them out of pain!' And the wounded are—my Highlanders, who follow me for love. There are MacDonalds and Ogilvies and men from the Isles—I see their faces, and the resolute,

keen pain that will not flinch. The wind's whistling down the moor like Rachel crying for her children, and the corbie-crows are looking on."

Sir Jasper crossed himself with instinctive piety. So had he felt, up yonder on the hills of Lancashire, when the winds raved through the heather and down the glens, teaching him sorrow, and the second sight, and the need to prove himself a man in a world of doubt and mystery.

"What then, your Highness?" he asked soberly.

"What then?" The Prince passed a hand across his eyes, turned with the smile that drew men to his side. "Your pardon, Sir Jasper. I've been up the hill o' dreams, since action is denied me. What then? Why, the road ahead, and each day's hazard as it comes."

The next day, as they marched out of Leek, in Staffordshire, Sir Jasper rode back along the line of march to see that Maurice, his younger born, was proving himself a good deputy in command of the Lancashire men. On his way through the scattered units that made up this army of the Prince's, he was met by a Highlander who came down the road on foot, carrying a mirror—a little, oak-framed thing that he had begged from a cottage where they had given him food and drink—and he was halting, now and then, to hold it up and look into it with pious fervour. And then again he would dance and taper like a child with a new toy before halting for another glance at it.

The man's antics were so droll, the humour of it all so unexpected, that Sir Jasper checked his horse. "What do you see there, my friend?" he asked, pointing to the mirror. He spoke a little Gaelic, which he had learned, with some hardship, from Oliphant of Muirhouse and other night-riders who had called at Windyhough during the past years.

The Highlander, hearing his own tongue, spoke as to a friend. "What do I see? My own face, and I've not seen it since I left Skye."

"Well, it's a face worth looking at," said the other, pass-

ing an easy jest. "You'll not be taken—alive—by any man in England; but I fear for you among the women."

And the man laughed pleasantly. And then, with surprising swiftness, the Skye gladness, that is never far from the mists o' sorrow, gave way to passionate tears. "It carried me back, this bit o' magic," he said, in the swift, tender speech for which there are no English words—"back to Skye, and the blue hills i' the gloamingtide, and the maid who would not have me at a gift. I used to go down by the burn, where the deep pool lies under the rowans, and see my face there—that was when I was courting Jock Sinclair's maid in last year's summer, and she said I'd a face to scare crows away with, but none for a lass that had the pick o' Skye to choose from."

"And you lost her, and came south to see if the yellow-haired laddie could give you likelier work?"

"Nay, I married her," said the Highlander, with a gravity complete and childlike. "She changed her mind in a week, and we'd a bonnie wooing; and since then she's led me the de'il's own dance ower dyke and ditch. And I used to get up to the hills and play the pipes, all by my lone among the whaups and eagles, and wish myself unwedded. And then the Prince called me, and I had to follow; and 'twas then I knew I loved her very well." He paused for a moment to glance into the mirror which, to him, was the pool in Skye where the rowans waved above the stream. "And now I'm missing her, and the pipes go skirling, skirling, and there's no man at all to fight with. It's thirsty I am to whet my claymore for a while, and then get home again to the de'il's dance Jock Sinclair's lass has waiting for me up in Skye."

Sir Jasper, by and by, rode back in search of his own company of horse, and his thoughts ran hither and thither. This Highlander, with the eyes and the sinewy, lean shoulders that any man or woman might approve, this passionate and simple child who went down the highway hugging his mirror because it brought Skye and the wooingtide to

mind—he was no more to these Midlands than a savage from the northern wilds. “They feed on English babies”—the lie set abroad by agents of a king who doubted his own cause, the lie repeated by a lazy, unkempt woman at the village ford, was chilling Sir Jasper now, though not long ago he had chidden the Prince for the same fault. It was in the breed of him to hate a lie at sight as healthy men loathe vermin. And yet they were powerless to meet this stealthy mode of warfare, because the Prince’s men, with all their faults, were accustomed only to the open fight and honest tactics.

Then, little by little, Sir Jasper sought for the cause of all this unrest and unhappiness that was dogging the steps of an army that had fought Prestonpans, that had taken Carlisle, that had marched through half England with a security which in itself was triumph. They were heading straight for London. The men, undaunted by forced marches, were in keen fighting temper, asking constantly for the enemy to show himself. Fortune was with them; the glow of old allegiance was with them. Each league they covered was so much added proof to the waverers that they followed a winning cause. And yet somehow a chill was settling on them all, a cold, intangible distrust. Sir Jasper felt it against his will. The Prince was feeling it.

Sir Jasper had set out on this enterprise with a single aim; but already his view of it was muddied a little by the politics, the jealousies, the daily friction that creep into the conduct of all human ventures. He could not stand far off, as yet, from the bigness and simplicity of the dreams he had nursed at Windyhough. Up yonder on the moors, as he mapped out the campaign, it had been a gallop against odds, a quick battle, death on the field, or a ride into London to see the Stuart crowned with fitting pomp and thanksgiving. And instead, there had been these days and days of marching at a foot pace, without a chance skirmish to enliven them—days spent in ploughing through roads fetlock-deep in mud, with the east wind harrying them like a scolding tongue, days spent in

watching the leaders of the Highland clans drifting each day nearer to the whirlpool of unrest that revolved about Lord Murray.

The men who passed Sir Jasper, as he rode back to join his company, were awed by the sheer fury in his face. He did not see them. Kilted men on foot met him, and Lowlanders in tattered breeks, riding nags as rough-coated as themselves. And some from the pick of Scotland's chivalry glanced at him for a nod of recognition, and saw him looking straight ahead with murder in his eyes.

Sir Jasper was in the mood that, now and then, had frightened his wife up yonder on the moors of Lancashire. He had kept the Faith. He had given up wife and bairns and lands if things chanced to go astray. And there was one man in this Rising who was the traitor in their midst. Scholarly, yet simple in his piety, Sir Jasper was in the thick of that stormy mood which hillmen know—a mood pitiless and keen as the winds bred in the hollows of the wintry moor, a mood that goes deeper than training, and touches, maybe, the bed-rock of those stormy passions known to the forefathers of the race when all the heath was lit with feuds.

It was now that good luck found Sir Jasper. There was an empty stretch of road in front of him. He was alone with the black mood that he hated—the mood he could not kill; and the bitter wind was finding out the weak places in a body not too young. And then round the bend of the highway rode Lord Murray; and Sir Jasper felt a little stir of gladness, as if the wind had shifted to a warmer quarter.

Murray was unaccompanied, save for his aide-de-camp—a careless, pleasant-faced youth of twenty, Johnstone by name, who was destined afterwards to write a diverting and boyishly inaccurate account of a campaign whose shallows only, not its depths, were known to him.

"Of all men, I've hoped most to meet you, my lord Murray," said Sir Jasper, drawing rein. "Your friend can ride apart; I've much to say to you."

Murray, too, drew rein, glanced hard and uncivilly at Sir Jasper, and turned with a smile to his aide-de-camp. "The Lancashire manner is curt, Mr. Johnstone," he said. "What is this gentleman's name again? He joined us at Langton, I remember, and his Highness was pleased to overdo the warmth of his greeting. It is a way the Prince has, and it answers well enough with the women, to be sure."

"My name is Jasper Royd," broke in the other, his temper at a smooth white heat, "and it is entirely at your service after this campaign is ended. I permit no man to sneer at his Highness, and you'll give me satisfaction later."

Lord Murray took a pinch of snuff, smiled again behind his hand at Johnstone. "There's something—what shall I say, sir?—something old-fashioned in your loyalty, though it sits well enough on you, if 'twere a play we acted."

"My loyalty is—just loyalty. There's no change of fashion can alter the clean faith of a man."

"Your pardon, but was this all you had to say to me? The wind is shrewd, Sir Jasper, and we can discuss loyalty—and punctilio and the duel you are eager for—when we next find an inn to shelter us."

Murray's harsh, narrow egotism had seldom shown to worse advantage than now. Since first Sir Jasper rode into Langton Street with the big air about him that simple-minded gentlemen are apt to carry, since Murray had seen the Prince's welcome, his jealousy had taken fire. It had slumbered during the last days of hardship, but this meeting on the road had quickened it.

"I had more to say, much more," Sir Jasper answered, quiet and downright. "Again I ask you to bid Mr. Johnstone ride behind."

"No, by your leave; he has my full confidence. You may speak your mind at once; but be speedy, for I would remind you that this is not midsummer."

Young Johnstone laughed, as youth will at unlikely times; and the laugh added a fine edge to Sir Jasper's temper,

"Then, as you'll have it so, Mr. Johnstone shall be a listener. It is of this Rising I mean to speak—and of your share in it. You are young, Lord Murray, and I am getting old. You're riding to the warfare you learned in set battles overseas, but we—the Prince, God bless him! and the Highlanders and my good lads from Lancashire—are out on a wider road."

"You will explain?" drawled Murray.

"D'ye think five thousand of us, ill-armed, can win to London by rules of war and maps and compasses?"

"I did not think from the first we had a chance of reaching London," snapped the other.

"Yes," put in Sir Jasper adroitly. "We knew as much. You said, before Annan was reached, that we'd no chance of getting beyond Carlisle."

"Who told you that?" said Murray, flurried and unguarded.

"Oliphant of Muirhouse, who never lies, my lord. Well, we're here in Staffordshire, and the London road still open to us; and your prophecy, somehow, has miscarried."

Murray grew fidgety. Hot temper he knew, and suavity he knew, but not this subtle mixture of the two. "Thank our good luck for that. They say Heaven guards all fools."

"But more especially all true believers. That is my point. We're adventurers, Lord Murray, not seasoned troops. We ride by faith, we ride for love of the Prince, of what he stands for—and we have come through odds that cautious generals would shirk—but we are here, in Staffordshire, and the London road, I say, is open to us."

"Well, then, it's a sermon, after all, you wish to preach. The clergy, my good Sir Jasper, are wiser than you; they preach between four snug walls that shut off this cursed wind."

"Not a sermon," said Sir Jasper doggedly. "I preach common sense, to one whose faith is dulled by tactics."

Murray lost the bullying air that had carried him fairly

well through life. He felt dwarfed, ashamed, by some quality in Sir Jasper that overrode his self-importance and trampled it in the mire. "Sir Jasper," he asked sullenly, "may I ask you for plain speech? What is your quarrel with me?"

"You ask for plain speech? And you'll not ask Mr. Johnstone to ride out of earshot? No? Then he, too, shall listen to plain speech."

There was a moment's silence. Murray wondered at the tense, lean carriage of this Lancashire squire, whose loyalty had been a jest among the cynics of the army, but for the others a steady beacon-light. He wondered more that Sir Jasper's face, grey and lined a while since, was comely now in its heat and youthfulness.

"I say—deliberately, my lord—that you're the Judas in this enterprise. I'm getting old, as I said, and I've looked about me during these last days, and I speak of what I know." His temper cooled suddenly, but not his purpose. There was no pleasure now in lashing Murray—only the need to do his duty, as if he were bidden to shoot a deserter, made up of the same human clay and the same human frailty as he who pressed the trigger. "The Highlanders—the rank and file—you cannot reach. But their leaders, my lord Murray—you know as well as I that you're at work each day undermining the faith of better men and cleaner-hearted soldiers than yourself. It's no secret that you wish to retreat——"

"To retreat, the better to spring forward," put in Murray, with half-hearted effrontery.

"To *retreat*, I said. The Prince goes forward always. It is his habit. You've won many of the Highland chiefs to your side, but the best of them you cannot tempt."

"You are curiously exact in your knowledge of my doings," sneered Murray.

"I made it my business since the day I first set eyes on you at Langton. That is neither here nor there. And yet there are some of us you cannot tempt. The Duke of Perth——"

"Yes, he, too, is mediæval," snarled Murray. "You and he are out of date, Sir Jasper, and I tell you so."

Again young Johnstone laughed, though at heart his sympathy and liking went out to this queer, downright squire from Lancashire.

"Then Lochiel," went on Sir Jasper buoyantly—"is he, too, old and out of date? Lochiel—you know how the very name of him sings music to the Highlanders. Lochiel—dear God! the tears are in my eyes; he's so like the free open moors I've left behind me."

Murray's thin lips came together. It was plain now where the weakness lay in a face that otherwise was strong and manly. The mouth was that of a nagging woman querulous, undisciplined, lined with bygone sneers. He was jealous of the Prince—jealous of this fine, upstanding squire who spoke his mind with disconcerting openness; but, most of all, he was jealous of Lochiel—Lochiel, the whisper of whose name set fire to loyal Highlandmen; Lochiel, who was gay and courtly and a pleasant comrade; Lochiel, who was hard as granite when men touched his inner faith; he was all that Lord Murray hated, all that Murray wished to be, and could not be.

"Sir Jasper, you've been plain of speech," he said, with sudden fury. "Our quarrel need not be delayed. I ask Mr. Johnstone here if I can wait to give you satisfaction—until"—again the smile that was a sneer—"until after we are all beheaded on Tower Hill."

Sir Jasper glanced up and down the road. They had it to themselves, though at any moment a company might ride into view along the straggling route. It was a grave breach of discipline, this duel in the midst of warfare; and yet, somehow, he found it welcome. He turned to the aide-de-camp, glanced quietly at him.

"Mr. Johnstone," he said, "you cannot be friendly to Lord Murray and myself—it's too wide a gulf for young legs to jump—but I can trust you, by the look of you, to see fair

play between us. I have no friend at hand, and it happens that this business must be settled quickly."

They rode apart from the route, into a little wood where sycamores and oaks were bending to the keen, whipping gale. They found an open space, and got from horse, and took off their coats. To Lord Murray, a good swordsman, it was a chance to put out of action one who, in breed and temper, was too near akin to the Stuart and Lochiel. To Sir Jasper it was a call, clear, unhurried, to remove a traitor from the midst of honest men.

They faced each other in the little glade. Murray was mathematical, exact, secure in his gift of fence. Sir Jasper was as God made him—not reckoning up the odds, but trusting that honesty would win the day. Young Johnstone watched; and, despite himself, his heart ached for the older man who pitted Lancashire swordcraft against Murray's practised steel.

The fight was quick and brief; and the unexpected happened, as it had done throughout this march of faith against surprising odds. Sir Jasper was not fighting for his own hand, but for the Prince's; and his gift of fence—to himself, who knew how time had rusted his old bones—was a thing magical, as if a score of years or so had been lifted from his shoulders.

At the end of it he got clean through Murray's guard; and it was now that the duel grew dull and tragic to him, robbed altogether of its speed, its pleasant fire. He had fought for this one moment; he had his chance to strike wherever he chose, to kill or lay aside the worst enemy Prince Charles had found, so far, in England. And yet, somehow, his temper was chilled, and the struggle with himself, short as the flicker of an eyelid, seemed long, because it was so sharp and bitter. With an effort that was palpable to young Johnstone, looking on, he drew back his blade, rested its point in the sodden turf, and stood looking at his adversary.

The action was so deliberate, so unexpected, that Murray

let his own point fall; and even he was roused for the moment from his harshness. He knew that this Lancashire squire, with the uncompromising tongue and the old-fashioned view of loyalty, had given him his life just now—had given it with some sacrifice of inclination—knew that, in this wet and out-of-the-way corner of the world, he was face to face with a knighthood that he had thought dead long ago.

And then Sir Jasper grew ashamed, in some queer way, of the impulse that had bidden him let Murray go unscathed. He sheathed his sword, bowed stiffly, untethered his horse, and got to saddle.

"I give you good-day, Lord Murray," he said curtly. "God bring you nearer to the Prince in days to come."

Murray watched him ride through the glade, out toward the open road where wayfaring loyalists were on the march. And from his shame and trouble a quiet understanding grew. His starved soul was quickened. A gleam from the bigger life cut across his precision, his self-importance, his gospel of arithmetic.

His aide-de-camp looked on. Johnstone was unused to the tumults that beset older heads; and he had made a hero of this man who had been defeated—a little more than defeated—at his own game of swordcraft. And he was puzzled because Murray did not curse his fortune, or bluster, or do anything but stand, hilt to the ground, as if he were in a dream.

It was all quick in the doing. Murray got himself in hand, shrugged his shoulders, searched for his snuff-box. "This is all very dismaying, Mr. Johnstone," he drawled. "I said from the start that we were forgetting every rule of warfare in this mad Rising. And yet—to be honest, Sir Jasper is something near to what I dreamed of before the world tired me—he's very like a man, Mr. Johnstone. And there are few real men abroad these days."

Sir Jasper himself, as he rode back into the highway, was in a sad and bitter mood. He had spoken his mind, had

fought and won the duel he had welcomed, and reaction was telling heavily on him just now. After all, he had done more harm than good by this meeting with Lord Murray. Private quarrels, carried as far as this had been, were treasonable, because they weakened all the discipline and speed of an attack against the common enemy. Moreover, a man of Murray's temper could never understand how serviceable it is to admit defeat, and forget it, and go forward with the business of the day; he would plant the grudge, would tend and water it, till it grew from a sapling into a lusty, evil tree.

He drew rein as he came through the ill-found bridle-track into the open road. Scattered men, on horse or on foot, passed by him; for the fight in the wood had been brief, and an army of five thousand takes long to straggle over slushy, narrow highways. And then Sir Jasper's face grew cheery on the sudden. A company, in close and decent order, rode into view. He saw Lancashire faces once again—his son's, and Squire Demaine's, and Giles the bailiff's, and fifty others that he knew by heart.

They met him at the turning of the way, drew up, saluted him. And Sir Jasper found his big, spacious air again, because he was at home with men who knew his record—with men reared, like himself, within sight of Pendle's round and friendly hill.

"We're full of heart, lads from Lancashire," he said, taking the salute as if he led a pleasant partner out to dance the minuet. "By gad! we're full of heart, I tell you," he broke off, with sharp return to his habit of command. "The London road is open to the Prince; there are three armies chasing us, so I'm told, but they seem to shun close quarters. Lancashire men, I'm old, and all my bones are aching—and yet I'm gay. Giles, your face is sour as cream in thunder weather; Maurice, though you're my son, you look lean and shrivelled, as if the wind had nipped you; is it only the old men of this Rising who are full of heart?"

"We're spoiling for a fight, sir," said Maurice, with a boy's outspoken fretfulness, "and instead there's only this marching through dull roads, and no hazards to meet us——"

"No heroics, you mean," broke in Squire Demaine, who was riding close beside Maurice. "See you, my lad, this is open war," he went on—gruffly, because he, too, was weary of inaction. "And war is not the thing the ballads sing about. It's not crammed with battles, and all the ladies watching, ready with tears and lollipops for the wounded; it's a bleak affair of marching, with little porridge and less cream to it—until—until you're sick from hunger and fatigue. And then the big battle comes—and it sorts out the men from the weaklings. And that is war, I tell you."

Sir Jasper reined up beside him, and the two older men rode forward, and the interrupted march moved stolidly again along the road to London—pad of hoofs, slush of tired footmen through the sleety mire, whinnying of dispirited horses and murmur of round Lancashire oaths from the farmers who had left plough and fieldwork behind them, as they thought, and were finding the like dour routine on this highway where no adventures met them.

"You heartened our men just now—and, gad! they needed it," said Squire Demaine, as they trotted out of earshot. "But you carry a sad face, old friend, for all that. What ails you?"

"Lord Murray ails me," snapped the other. "He's like a pestilence among us."

"You're precise. He is a pestilence. If we could persuade Marshal Wade—or George—to take him as a gift, why, we'd reach London sooner. Give away a bad horse, if you can't sell him, and let him throw the other man—there's wisdom in the old saws yet."

"I'm ashamed, Demaine," said Sir Jasper, turning suddenly. "You gave Maurice sound advice just now, when he was headstrong and asking for a battle as children cry for toys. And yet it was I who needed your reproof."

And then he told of his meeting with Lord Murray on the road, of the fury that he could not check, of the duel in the wood. His tale was told so simply, with such diffidence and surety that he had been in the wrong, that Squire Demaine laughed gently.

"There's nothing to your discredit, surely, in all this," he said—"except that you spared the Prince's evil-wisher. Gad! I wish my blade had been as near Murray's heart. I—"

"You would have done as I did. We know each other's weaknesses, Demaine—that is why our friendship goes so deep, may be. You'd have done as I did. We relent—as soon as we are sure that we have proved our case—have proved it to the hilt."

So then Squire Demaine blustered a little, and denied the charge, then broke into a laugh that was heard far back along the line of march.

"Squire's found his hunting-laugh again," said one Lancashire yeoman to his neighbour.

"Aye. We need it, lad," the other answered. "There's been no hunting these last days."

The Squire himself rode silently beside his friend, then turned in saddle. "Yes, we relent," he said, with his happy-go-lucky air. "Is that our weakness, Royd—or our strength?"

"I do not know." Sir Jasper's smile was grave and questioning. "The devil's sitting on my shoulders and I do not know. A week since I'd have said that faith—"

"Aye, faith. We hold it fast—we know it true—but, to be honest, I've lost my bearings. I'd have dealt more gently with Maurice if I'd not shared his own longing for a fight."

"Faith is a practical affair." Sir Jasper was cold and self-reliant again, as when he had fought with Murray in the wood. "When the road is at its worst, and sleet blows up from the east, and we ask only to creep into the nearest ditch, and die as cowards do—when all seems lost. Demaine—surely, if faith means anything at all, it means—"

"You're more devout than I," snapped the Squire. "So is the Prince. I talked with him yesterday. He was wet to the skin, and had just given his last dram of brandy to one Hector MacLean who had cramp in the stomach—and I was hasty, may be, as I always am when I see royalty of any sort go beggared. 'Your Highness,' I said, 'the Blood Royal should receive, not give, and you needed that last dram, by the look of your tired face.' And what did he answer, think ye? 'You've an odd conception of royalty, sir,' said the Prince, his eyes hard and tender both. 'The Blood Royal—my father's and mine—gives till it can give no more. It lives, or it dies—but it goes giving to the last hour.' He's a bigger man than I am, Royd."

They jogged forward. And presently Sir Jasper broke the silence. "We are hurrying to dodge two armies, and we're succeeding; would God they'd both find us, here on the road, and give us battle! That is our need. One battle against odds—and our men riding free and keen—and Murray would find his answer. I'd rather be quit of him that way than—than by striking at the bared breast of the man."

"I know, I know," murmured the Squire, seeing how hard Sir Jasper took this battle in the wood. "Let Murray run his neck into the nearest halter; he's not fair game for honest gentlemen. You were right. And yet—my faith runs low, I tell you, and you might have spared a better man. The mouth of him—I can see it now, like a rat's, or a scolding woman's—you've a tenderer conscience than I."

Into the middle of their trouble rode Maurice, tired of shepherding men who blamed him because he found no battle for them.

"I was sorry that Rupert could not ride with us," he said, challenging Sir Jasper's glance.

Sir Jasper winced, for his heir was dear to him beyond the knowledge of men who have never bred a son to carry on the high traditions of a race. "If pluck could have brought him, he'd have been with us, Maurice," he said sharply.

"I was not denying his pluck, sir; he gave me a taste of it that day he fought like a wild cat on the moor." His face flushed, for he had not known, until the separation came, how deep his love went for his brother. The novelty and uproar of the march had stifled his heartache for a day or two, but since then he had missed Rupert at every turn. "It was because I—because I know his temper, sir," he went on, with a diffidence unlike his usual, quick self-reliance. "He'd have been all for high faith, and a battle at the next road-corner; and these days of trudging through the sleet would have maddened him. I'm glad he stayed at home. He'd have picked a quarrel long since with one of our own company, just to prove his faith."

Squire Demaine glanced dryly at Sir Jasper. "The young pup and the old pup, Royd. Maurice here has better judgment than I thought. I always said that Rupert was true to the Royd breed. Your own encounter in the wood just now—"

"Your encounter, sir?" broke in Maurice eagerly. "Giles was saying to me just now that he'd rather be riding on his bailiff's business up among the hills than be following this dog-trot through the rain. He said—and he was so quiet that I knew his temper was red-raw—he said that naught was ever like to happen again, so far as he could see, and he was longing for a thunderstorm, just to break up the quietness, like."

The boy was so apt in his mimicry of Giles that Squire Demaine gave out the frank, hearty bellow that did duty for a laugh. "We're all of the same mind, my lad. Thunder—or a straight, soon over fight—clears up one's troubles."

"Your encounter, father?" said Maurice, persistent in his curiosity. "Did you meet a spy of George's, and kill him?"

Sir Jasper looked at this younger-born of his, at the frank, open face and sturdy limbs. And then he thought, with that keen, recurrent stab of pain that had been bedfellow to him since first he knew his heir a weakling, of Rupert, left up at

Windyhough to guard a house that—so far as he could see just now—was in need of no defence.

"It was not—not just a spy of George's I met," he said, with a grave smile. "He may come to that one day. And I did not kill him, Maurice, though I had the chance."

"Why, sir?" said Maurice, downright and wondering.

"Why? God knows. We'd best be pushing forward."

At Windyhough, where the wind had piled a shroud of snow about the gables, they were thinking, all this time, that those who had ridden out were fortunate. As day by day went by, and Rupert found himself constantly alone in a house where only women and old men were left, he found it harder to stay at home, drilling the household to their separate parts in an attack whose likelihood grew more and more remote.

Rupert, with a body not robust and a twisted ankle that was still in bandages, was holding fast to his allegiance. His mother, less pampered and less querulous, grew each day a more sacred trust. Each day, as she watched him go about the house, he surprised more constantly that look of the Madonna which stood out against the background of her pretty, faded face. He had something to defend at last, something that played tender, stifled chords about that keyboard which we call the soul. He was alone among the women and the old men; but he was resolute.

And then there came a night when he had patrolled the house, had looked out through his window, before getting to bed, for a glance at the hilltops, white under a shrouded moon. He was tired, was seeking an answer to his faith. And, instead, a darkness came about him, a denial of all he had hoped for, prayed and striven for. Hope went by him. Trust in God grew dim and shadowy. There was no help, in this world or another, and he was a weak fool, as he had always been, drifting down the path of the east wind.

He recalled, with pitiless clearness, how he had played eavesdropper before the Rising men rode out, had heard his

father say that no attack on Windyhough was possible, that the guns and ammunition were nursery toys he had left his heir to play with in his absence.

Rupert—namesake of a cavalier whose name had never stood for wisdom, but always for high daring—stood with bowed shoulders, unmanned and desolate. He did not know that the wise, older men he reverenced were compelled to stand, time and time, as he was doing, with black night and negation at their elbow. He knew only that it was cold and dark, with no help at hand. It is moments such as this that divide true men from the feeble-hearted; and Rupert lifted his head, and, though he only half believed it, he told himself that dawn would follow this midwinter night.

And that night he slept like a child, and dreamed that all was well. And he woke the next day to find Simon Foster watching by his bedside, patient and trusty as the dogs whose instinct is toward loyalty.

"You've slept, maister!" said Simon. "By th' Heart, I never saw a body sleep so sound."

"We must patrol the house, Simon. The attack is coming—and we'll not be late for it, after all these days of waiting."

"Who says the attack is coming?" growled the other.

"I dreamed it—the clearest dream I ever had, Simon."

But Simon shook his head. He had no faith in dreams.

CHAPTER IX

THE STAY-AT-HOMES

WINTER is not always rough on the high moors of Lancashire. There are days when the wind creeps into hiding, and the sun comes up into a sky of blue and saffron, and the thrush begins to find his mating-note before its time. The gnats steal out from crannies in the walls, making pretence of a morris-dance along the slant rays of the sun; and everywhere there is a pleasant warmth and bustle, as if faith in this far-off summer, after all, had easily survived the east wind's spite.

It was on such a day—the breeze soft from the west, and Pendle Hill all crimson in the sunset—that Rupert limped out from Windyhough on the crutch that Simon Foster had made for him. He had gone his round of the house—that empty round performed for duty's sake twice every day—and he was hungry for the smell of the open country. He hobbled up the pastures, as far as the rough lands where the moor and the intaken fields were fighting their old, unyielding battle—a feud as old as the day when the first heath-man drove his spade into the heather and began to win a scanty living from the wilderness for wife and bairns.

Rupert, the dreamer, who had stood apart from life, had always found his sanctuary here, where the broken lands lay troubled, like himself, between the desert and the harvest. Instinct had led him here to-night, though weakness of body, never far from him, was trying once again to sap his courage.

He looked across the moor, strong and comely in its winter nakedness. He watched a cock-grouse whirr across the crimson sun-rays. And then, with a sense of thanksgiving and security, he saw the round, stalwart bulk of Pendle Hill.

There is something about Pendle—a legacy from the far-off fathers, may be—that goes deep to the heart of Lancashire men. Its shape is not to be mistaken. It stands like a rounded watch-tower, guarding the moors where freedom and rough weather go hand in hand. It has seen many fights of men—feuds, and single-handed combats, and stealthy ambushes—and has come, stalwart and upstanding, through weather that would have daunted meaner souls. It has the strong man's gift of helping weaker men along the gallant, uphill climb that stretches from the cradle to the stars.

Pendle Hill, big above the wilderness of bog and heath, never chatters of destiny, never tells a man that life is hard, that he had best be done with it, that all his striving has been so much useless labour. Pendle, the fairest citadel of Lancashire, has won through too many generations of cold and hardship to be daunted by the troubles of one man's lifetime. Rugged, round to the wide, wind-swept skies, old Pendle keeps the faith, and will not yield.

Rupert had yet to win his spurs, he thought. And yet, as Pendle Hill viewed the matter, he had won them long ago. Day by day, year by year, through his unhappy and disastrous boyhood, the lad had come to the windy lands, for strength and solace. He had been loyal to the hills, steadfast when stronger men had taken their ease. And to-night, because it saw a soldier in the making, gruff Pendle sent out a welcome to Sir Jasper's heir.

"God knows me for a fool," said Rupert, afraid of the new message that had reached him.

And there was stillness, while the sun's red died behind the moor. No voice answered Rupert's challenge to the over-world; but, for all that, he limped down to Windyhough with a sense that all the birds were singing. Through the misery and darkness of these days he was reaching out, with stubborn gallantry, to grasp the forward hope. The forward hope! He had lived on little else since he was breeked.

As he came down to Windyhough, he met Nance and old Simon Foster at the courtyard gate; Simon was carrying a musket, and polishing the barrel with his sleeve as he hobbled at the girl's side.

"I've news for you, Rupert!" she said gaily.

"Of the Rising?" He was eager, possessed of the one thought only. "Is trouble nearing Windyhough? Nance, is there real work to be done at last?"

"Oh, my dear, you ask too much. Nothing ever happens at Windyhough; nothing will ever happen again, I think. We're derelict, Rupert; the Highlandmen are playing their Prince into his kingdom by this time, and we"—she grew bitter, petulant, for the silence and the waiting were sapping her buoyant health, her courage, her trust in high endeavour—"and we in Lancashire are churning our butter every week, Rupert, and selling cows on market days, and dozing by the hearth. *I am ashamed.*"

Simon Foster glanced sharply at Rupert. He knew the lad through and through, was prepared for the whiteness of his face, the withdrawal as if a friend had struck him wantonly. "Miss Nance," he said bluntly, "shame is for folk that's earned it. There's three of us here, and we'd all be marching into London, if only it could have happened that way, like."

Nance would not look at Rupert, though she guessed how she had wounded him. She did not know this mood that had settled on her since coming to the draughty, loyal house of Windyhough. The long inaction, the waiting for news gathered from gruff, hard-ridden messengers, the day-long wish to be out in the thick of battle, had troubled her; but there was a deeper trouble—a trouble that was half delight, a turmoil and unrest to which she could not give a name. And the trouble centred round Rupert. She liked him so well, had grown up with his queer, dreamy ways, his uncomplaining courage.

She had laughed at him, had pitied him; but now she was

pitying herself. If only he would remember that he was a man, the heir to a fine, loyal record—if only he would clear the cobwebs from his eyes, and sit a horse as other men did, would show the stuff his soul was made of, the world would understand him at long last.

Nance was tired, her temper out of hand. "Simon, you can go indoors," she said dryly. "Since you did not join the Rising—why, Lady Royd has work for you."

She did not know what she needed, or what ailed her. And she and Rupert stood in the courtyard after old Simon had gone in, fronting each other like wary duellists.

"What was your news?" asked Rupert, his temper brittle like her own.

"Oh, we set up a target, Simon and I; and I practised with one of your clumsy muskets, Rupert, and wished that I had a bow-and-arrow in my hands instead. I have some skill in archery, have I not?"

"Yes. You've skill in all things, Nance. There's no news in that."

"And I aimed very wide at first, till I turned and found Simon smiling as if he were watching a baby at its play. So then I kept him hard at work—loading, and priming, and the rest, and wasted a good deal of your ammunition, Rupert—but I learned to hit the target."

She spoke lightly, hurriedly, as if fearing to sound the depths of this trouble that had come between Rupert and herself.

"Was it just to pass the time?" he asked by and by. "You're shut in here and restless, I know—"

"It was more, perhaps. We are so few, and I said just now that nothing would ever happen again at Windyhough—but the attack may come."

Rupert glanced at his crutch. He was sensitive, from long suffering, to the least hint that touched his personal infirmities. "And you could not trust your men to guard you?" he said sharply. "That was your thought?"

"Oh, Rupert, no! I'm out of heart—I did not mean to hurt you."

"You've not hurt me, Nance. I—I must find Simon and go the round of the house with him. We call it our drill." He turned at the door, glanced at her with the smile of self-derision that she knew. "Simon is right. He says that, if a man can't go soldiering, the next best thing is to play at it, like a bairn with a wooden sword. Good-night, Nance. I'm tired, and shall get to bed after seeing to the defences."

Nance heard the delicate irony as he spoke of the defences, saw him limp into the house. And some new feeling came to her. It was not pity; it was a strange, fugitive pride in the courage that could keep so harassed a spirit under control. She had been harsh and bitter, had wounded him because she needed any outlet from these pent-up days at Windyhough; and he had gathered his little strength together, had laughed at himself, had gone to the routine of guarding a house that did not need defence.

Nance was ashamed to-night. Her reliance and high spirits had deserted her; and for that reason she saw nearer to the heart of life. She felt that a great gentleman, marred in the making, had gone into this house of fine traditions. She asked, with an entreaty passionate and wilful as herself, why Rupert had been condemned to sit at home among the women, when so little more was needed to shape him to the comely likeness of a man.

And then she thought of Will Underwood, who had strength and grace of body, remembered with obstinate zeal her faith that he had ridden on some desperate business of the Rising, though men doubted him. And she was in the turmoil of first love again.

The next day, and the next, she missed Rupert from the house. He would go his rounds punctiliously after breakfast, and then would take a crust and a piece of cheese in his pocket and limp up into the hills. She thought that he was feeding his dreams, as of old, on the high winds and the

high legends of the heath; and she missed him, with a sense of loneliness that would not let her rest.

Simon Foster, too, was absent these days, and Lady Royd grew petulant. Though her husband was like to lose his head, and England was stirred by that throb of coming battle which is like thunder-heat before the rain and lightning come, she was troubled because Simon did not perform his indoor duties. For she, who had little guidance of herself, and therefore less control of serving-folk, was exact in her demand that all the details of the house should be well-ordered.

"I thought Simon at least tied by rheumatism to the house," she wailed to Nance, on the second day of absence; "but he's like all our men—off to the Rising, or off to the fields; any excuse will serve, it seems, when women feel their indoor loneliness."

And Nance, though her impulse was to laugh, was subdued by those blundering, poignant words, "their indoor loneliness." Nance was a child of the open fields, meeting all chances of life better in the free wind than in the stifled houses. Not until her coming to Windyhough had she understood the heartache, the repression, summed up by "their indoor loneliness." A fierce resentment took hold of her.

"Men have all the pleasure," she said, in a low, hard voice. "It was so always."

She would have been the better for a glimpse of the Prince's tattered army, fighting through sleet and mud and jealousy for the privilege of setting a Stuart on the throne. But Nance was young and untried yet, and thought herself ill-used because she had a roof above her.

And then Rupert came in, with Simon Foster close behind him.

"You've been at the ale-house, Simon," said Lady Royd shrewishly.

"No, by your leave. I've been on the King's business, and other needs must wait, my lady. So I was taught, leastways, when I was a bairn at my father's knee."

"What is the mystery, Rupert?" asked Nance, after Simon had grumbled his way toward the servants' quarters.

"Mystery? None, my dear, except that I'm tired to death, and have the round of the house to go before I get to bed."

He spoke the truth. Mystery there was none, except that out of his great love for her he was learning many lessons. And she tempted him, meanwhile, to tell her what this business was that had taken Simon and himself to the open fields; but he gave no answer.

And that evening passed, as many another had done, with a monotony that seemed to tick the seconds out, deliberate as the eight-day clock in the hall—a passionless, grave clock that had seen many generations of the Royds go through their hot youth, their fiery middle-age, their last surrender—surrender honourable, upright, staunch in the last hour, to that great general, Death, who has taken more citadels than any human hero of renown.

The eight-day clock knew that life was not meant to be taken at the gallop, each moment packed with ambush, high romance, fine-spoken wooing that could not outlast the honeymoon. It knew that fine deeds—big moments when the heart finds room to know itself—are earned by steady preparation, ticked out by the slow-moving seconds. But Nance had all this to learn as yet, and this evening, of all evenings she had spent at Windyhough, seemed the longest and the dreariest. And my lady's little spaniel—a nervous, unlicked lap-dog—annoyed her beyond reason.

Lady Royd was full of dread and surmise. First, she heard a mouse gnawing at the wainscoting, and fell into a panic obviously real. Then a farm-dog began to yelp and whimper from the stables, and she was sure it foretold disaster to her husband.

"It was so foolish of him," she said, "to go on this wild Rising. He had all to keep him here—his wife and his two sons and the house he loved, and the hunting in the winter. Why did he leave it all? He had *all* to keep him, Nance."

Because she was tired and heart-sick, perhaps, Nance spoke with a wisdom not her own; for at these times we do not lash instinct to the gallop, but let it carry us like a sure-footed horse. "Except his heart. It was his heart that took him south."

"But his heart was here, my girl," put in the other, with sudden spirit. She had been moved to terror by the sound of a mouse in the wainscoting; but she was fierce in her defence of the love her goodman bore her.

"No," said Nance gently, as if she persuaded a child to learn some obvious and simple lesson, "his heart could not be here until he had answered the call of honour."

"Oh, spare me!" sighed the other languidly. "Honour is so pretty a thing—like a rapier, or a Frenchman's wit—when they sing of it in ballads. But in practice it is like getting up at sunrise to see the poet's dawn—so chilly and uncomfortable, Nance."

"What else?" said Nance, her head thrown up with a sudden, eager gesture that was vastly like her father's. "Honour rusts, my lady, if it stays always in the scabbard. Discomfort? I think honour—Sir Jasper's and my father's—feeds on discomfort, thrives on it—"

"But Sir Jasper, what more did he need? He can find no more if he returns—no more than he left behind when he went on this wild-goose chase. I shall be waiting for him—the wife who loves him, no more, no less—"

"Is there a boundary-wall round love, then?" asked Nance, with eyes wide open and astonished. "I'm young and fanciful, perhaps. I thought love was a thing that found wider fields to travel every hour; that, each day one's man came home with honour, one cared for him ever a little the more, and knighted him afresh. For it is knighthood, surely, a true man asks always from the woman of his choice."

Lady Royd fingered her scent-bottle, and laughed vaguely, enjoying the girl's transparent honesty. "It all has a roman-

tic sound, Nance. Did you learn it from books, as poor Rupert learned his soldiery?"

The taunt stung Nance, because she had hoped, with odd persistency, that Rupert would come in, after going his round of the house, to ask her to sing to him. And he had not come; and she had tender songs enough in readiness, for she remembered how wantonly she had hurt him not long ago.

"Where did you learn it, girl?" insisted Lady Royd, with tired irony. "I'm past the age of glamour—and half regret it—and you may recapture for me all the fragment silliness. Nance, believe me, I cannot make a satisfying meal of dew-drops. I must be getting old, for I grow fonder and fonder of my cook, who sends substantial rations from the kitchen."

So then Nance, hot-headed, resentful, not guessing that she was being gently baited to while away an hour's boredom from her companion—Nance stood to her little, queenly height. And her eyes were beautiful, because her eagerness shone through them. And she tapped her buckled slipper on the beeswaxed floor, as if she were impatient to be dancing with true men, or dying with them along the road that Sir Jasper and his friends had sought.

"I learned it—as Rupert learned his soldiery, I think—not from books at all, my lady. It was my heart taught me, or my soul, or what you choose to name that something which is—is bigger, somehow, than one's self. Honour—I cannot tell you the keen, sharp strength, the sweetness and the pity the word spells for me. It is like the swords my father is so fond of—bright and slim, like toys to look at; but you can bend them till point touches hilt and yet not break them. And you can ride out and cleave a way with these same words."

Lady Royd was no cynic now. The peril and discomfort of the times had been opening closed windows for her, as for others who lived near this wind-swept heath. By stealth, and fearing much, she had peered out through these unshuttered casements; and Nance was speaking outright of the fugitive, dim thoughts that she herself had harboured.

"Go, my dear," she said gently. "You've the voice you sing with—the voice that Rupert praises. Go, sing to me again of—of love and honour, child."

Nance flushed. She scarcely knew what she had said. "I do not need," she said, with instinctive grace and dignity. "You know so much of them, and I so little; and I am sorry if—if I spoke in haste. I am so tired, and I forget the—the deference owing to your years."

So then, because they stood very near each other for this moment, and because she feared intimacy just yet with the simple, happy glimpse of life that Nance had shown her, Sir Jasper's wife drew her skirts about her and picked up the yapping, pampered thing she called a dog and kissed its nose. It was her signal for good-night.

"A woman likes deference, my dear," she said sharply, "deference of all kinds, except that owing to—to advancing years. You sang out of tune there, Nance. Never to be made love to again; never again, so long as one's little world lasts, to catch the glance, the little broken word of tribute—things that do not wrong one's husband, Nance, but add a spice to the workaday, quiet road of love for him; they're hard to give up, my dear."

Nance looked at her with frank surprise. She was strong and untried yet; and Lady Royd was frail, but experienced so far as indolence allowed. And there was a deep gulf between them.

"I will take my candle up," said Nance lamely.

"Yes, and sleep well, child. Dream of—oh, of love and honour and the foolish rosemary of life. And come sing to me to-morrow—of the things you've dreamed. Perhaps I spoke at random, Nance. I'm widowed of my husband; and this Rising never wore a lucky face to me—and—my temper is not gentle, Nance, I know."

That night there were few who slept at Windyhough. Sir Jasper's wife, alone with the wind that rattled at her window, made no disguise of the love that beat, strong and trusty, un-

derneath her follies. Despite herself, she had come out at last into the road of life—the road of mire and jealousies and tragedy, lit far ahead by the single lamp of honour, for those whose eyes were trained to see it.

"I'm not worthy of him," she moaned, drawing the sleepy spaniel toward her. "My husband climbs the bigger hills, while I—am weak, as Rupert is."

Nance, too, lay awake. She was busy with what Lady Royd had named the rosemary of life. All her instincts rose in warm defence of that view of honour which Sir Jasper's wife had slighted. And there were men, men in their own midst, who could love in the old knightly way. There was Will Underwood—and so she lost herself, half between waking and dreaming, in a maze of high perfection that she reared about his person. Of a truth Wild Will was in danger, had he known it. He had pressed his suit on Nance, had urged it, in and out of season, during the months that preceded this upset of the Rising. He had captured her fancy already, and her heart might follow any day; but he did not guess what simplicity and breadth of tenderness she would bring him, what answering devotion she would ask. Nance had the double gift—she had the woman's instincts, the woman's suppleness of fancy, but she had been reared in a house where a big, down-right father and big, uncompromising brothers had trained her to the man's code of life. She would never come to the wooing as to a one-sided bargain, giving all meekly and asking nothing in return. She would ask, with tenderest persistence, that her man, as she had said to Lady Royd, should claim knighthood at her hands once every while. Marriage, to her unproved heart, was a thing magical, renewing its romance each day—but renewing, too, that everyday and hard endeavour on which the true romance is founded.

And so she got to sleep at last, and woke in terror. She had dreamed that Will Underwood, engaged in a single-handed fight against a company of the Prince's enemies, lay wounded sorely; and she had reached out hands, impotent

with nightmare, to succour him, and she had seen him fall.

At the end of the long, draughty corridor, not many yards away from her, Rupert was fighting his new trouble. He and Simon had been engaged on the King's business—or the pretence of it—during these excursions that had taken them afield for two days past. But he could only remember now what had driven him into endeavour—how he had come home to find Nance flushed and eager, Simon carrying a couple of muskets; and how she had told him, in plain words, that women must needs take up soldiery, because the men about the house were so infirm.

Since his soul was launched into the open sea of life, Rupert had known many a Gethsemane, but the pain had never been so keen as now. His love for Nance was of the kind she claimed, but his power to do high deeds lagged far behind the will to be a conqueror. And Nance, who had always brought a sense of well-being and of inspiration to him, had wounded him—mortally, he thought. Sir Jasper had bidden him guard the house, and he had overheard his father say that the defence was a toy he left his heir to play with; and the bitterness of that was past, not without hardship and a struggle that, fought out in loneliness, was fine as a battle against heavy odds. That was past, but Nance's taunt was with him still, a sting that banished sleep and poisoned all his outlook on the hills where Faith, crowned and a strong monarch, looks down to see into the hearts of men and choose her soldiers.

Old Simon Foster, for his part, had not slept well to-night. As he put it to himself, he "was never one to miss sleep or victuals, come peace or earthquakes"; but to-night he could not rest. He was with the master, fighting somewhere near to that London which was a far-off land to him, unknown and perilous, as if wide seas divided it from Lancashire. And he was itching to be out of a house where the mistress could still be anxious lest her spaniel missed his proper meals, where, to his fancy, women crowded all the passages and

hindered him at every turn. Simon was twisted out of shape by exposure and harsh, rheumatic pains, but he was sick to be out again with the wind and the weather that had crippled him.

Simon Foster, too infirm to go with his master to the wars, was ill-tempered these days, as a grey old hound is when he sees the whelps of his own fathering go out to hunting while he is left at home. He was in and out of the house, till the women-servants grew tired of his grim, weather-beaten face. Only Martha put in a good word for him—Martha who, at five-and-thirty, had not found a mate, though she would have made a good wife to any man. Simon was barely turned fifty, she said, and was hale enough “if rheumatiz would only let him bide in peace.” And when a prim maid-of-all-work had suggested that bent legs tempted no maid’s fancy, Martha had answered hotly that the shape of a man’s heart mattered more than any casual infirmity attaching to his legs.

He got up this morning, two hours before the wintry dawn came red and buoyant over Pendle Hill, for he could not rest indoors. He went to the stables, his lantern swinging crazily in his gnarled hands, and roused the horses from the slumber that is never sleep, because men ask so much of them at all hours of the day and night, and patted them, as a father touches his bairns—gently, with a sort of benediction. For the smell of a horse to Simon was vastly comforting.

He came to an old, fiddle-headed nag that had been a pensioner at Windyhough these many years, and stayed and chatted with him with the ease that comes of long comradeship.

“We’re in the same plight, lad,” he growled—“old, and left at homie, the two of us. Ay, we’re thrown on the lumber-heap, I reckon.”

He went out by and by; and his face cleared suddenly like wintry sunlight creeping over a grey stubble-field, as he saw

Martha cross from the mistals with a milking-pail over each well-rounded arm. And, because there seemed little else to do, he stopped to praise the trim shape of her.

"And your cheeks, Martha," he added, after a pause—"there's some warm wind been at 'em, or they'd never look so bonnie."

"Winds blow cold up hereabout," said Martha demurely, setting down her pails. "And my cheeks are my own, Simon Foster, by your leave."

Simon had known this game of give-and-take with a lass in the days before he grew harder and more keen on battle. He returned now with ease to habits forsown until the Rising left him derelict among the women.

"Nay, but they're not, as the bee said to the clover."

"For shame, Simon—and at your age, too!"

"At my age! I'd teach ye I'm young if rheumatiz was not like a hive o' bees about me."

She twisted a corner of her apron, half hid her face with it; and Simon admitted to himself that the brown eyes looking into his "might be tempting, like, to a younger lad than me."

"At my age a man's just beginning to know women," he said persuasively. "It takes a long 'prenticeship, Martha. You can learn to break in a horse, or do smithy work, or aught useful like, in a lile few years. But to learn the way of a woman—durned if it isn't a long job and a tough job, Martha."

"We're very simple, if you men weren't blind as bats at midday."

"Oh, ay; you're simple!" put in Simon, with a quiet chuckle. "Simple as driving sows to market."

So then Martha put a hand to each of her milking-pails. "I'd best be getting on with my work. If you're likening me to a sow—"

"There, there! It wasn't you lass; it was women not just so bonnie—the most part o' women, I mean."

Martha lingered. The deft flattery had pleased her, and

she was willing to surrender any casual defence of her own sex. "Well, the most part o' women, Simon, they're feather-witted maybe. I'll own as much."

"And like sows," went on the other, with patient explanation of his theme. "A man chooses his straight road and sticks to it, but a sow, when you want to get her Lunnon way, why, you've just to twist her by the tail, backward foremost, and pretend you want her to head straight for Scotland."

They eyed each other with a large, impassive silence. There was plenty of leisure these days at Windyhough, too much of it; and Simon found it pleasant to watch Martha's wholesome, wind-sweet face, to hear the voice that seemed made for singing to the kine while she sat at the milking-pail. And Martha, for her part, had never known a wooing, and the prime hunger of her life still went unsatisfied.

"Human nature—it's a queer matter," said Simon by and by.

"And there's a deal of it about," sighed Martha. "Human nature—soon as ever a body can get away from moil and toil and begin to think, like—why, it's just made up o' things we haven't got, Simon. And if we'd got them we shouldn't care so much for 'em, and so it's all a round o' foolishness, like a donkey treading at the mill-wheel."

A tear fell down on to Martha's hand, and, because the grief was come by honestly, Simon felt an odd impulse stirring him. "Martha, my lass, I wish I was a good twenty years younger. If I were forty, now, and you——"

"I'm nearing forty, Simon. We'll not talk of ages, by your leave."

Simon walked up and down the yard, in a mood that was half between panic and something worthier. Then he came to Martha's side. "I've a mind to kiss you," he said.

"Well, I'm busy," said Martha; "but I might happen spare time."

And so they plighted troth. And Simon, when at last

he went indoors to get about the duties Lady Royd found for him, was astonished that he had no qualms. He had given his promise, and knew that, as a man of his word, he would keep it. All old instincts whispered that he had been "varry rash to tie himself in a halter in that fool's fashion"; and yet he felt only like a lad who goes whistling to help his lass bring in the kine to byre.

As he reached the house, Nance, in her riding-habit, stepped out into the courtyard. Tired of her restless dreams, weary to death of the inaction and misery at Windyhough, she had stolen out of the house like a thief, afraid lest Lady Royd should need her before she made good her escape. She flushed guiltily even at this meeting with Simon, as if he had detected her in wrong-doing, though her longing for a gallop was innocent enough.

"You're for riding on horseback, Miss Nance?" he asked, by way of giving her good-day.

"Yes, Simon. I shall die if I spend another day indoors. It is like being wrapped in cotton-wool."

"Well, now, you're right! I've just been to the stables myself," he added dryly, "and you've the pick of three rare stay-at-homes to choose from. One's broken-winded, and one's spavined, and t'other's lame in the off hind-leg. There's a fine choice for you!"

"Which of the three shall I choose?" laughed Nance.

"Oh, I'd take the broken-winded one, with the head like Timothy Wade's bass-viol that he plays i' church. He's a lot o' fire in him yet—if you don't mind him roaring like a half-gale under you. I was talking to him just now—telling him the oldsters had as much pluck in 'em as the youngsters. It was a shame, I said, to leave such spirited folk as him and me behind."

Nance gave him a friendly smile—he had always been a favourite of hers, by force of his tough, homespun strength and honesty—and crossed the yard. The stablemen and grooms were off with Sir Jasper to the wars—all save two

who were past seventy, and were warming themselves indoors before facing the nipping wind. She found the three horses left, like the stablemen, because of age and infirmity, and helped Simon, with a quickness she had learned in childhood, to saddle the fiddle-headed beast that he had recommended.

The beast had been eating his head off, and was almost youthful in caprice and eagerness as Nance rode him up into the moors. He had watched his comrades go out a week ago—mettled youngsters, neighing with wide nostrils from sheer lust of adventure—and he had been left to eat more corn than was good for him, left to think back along the years when men had needed him to carry the burden of their hopes.

The horse knew, perhaps, that Nance, like himself, was seeking respite from indolence and the companionship of ailing folk. He carried her bravely, and disguised from her for a while, with a certain chivalry, the fact that he was broken-winded. When they came to the moor, however, the smell of the marshes and the ling seemed to get to his head, like too much wine; and twice he all but unseated Nance, who was thinking of Will Underwood, riding south like her father into that perilous country where George the Second was seated on a stolen throne.

The horse, after his display of youthfulness, was content to laze up and down the sheep-tracks of the heath; and even Nance, blind as she was by habit to the failings of her comrades, was aware that he was roaring now like a half-gale from the north.

Then she forgot the horse, forgot the languid mother, the weakling heir, down yonder at the bleak house of Windy-hough. Her thoughts returned to her father, to Sir Jasper, to gentle and simple of the Lancashire men who had ridden out against long odds. Last of all, her maidenly reserve broke down, and she knew that she was eager for Will Underwood's safety. She saw him so clearly—fearless, a keen

rider after hounds, a man who sought danger and coveted it. Surely he was made for such reckless battles as were coming. Through her anxieties, through her womanish picturing of the wounds and sickness that were lying in wait along this high-road that led south to victory and the Stuart, she was glad that "Wild Will" would need her prayers, her trust in him.

She rode slowly up by way of Hangman's Snout—a bluff, round hill that once had carried a gallows-tree. Line by swarthy line the heath widened out before her as she climbed. Crumpled hillocks, flat wastes of peat, acre after acre of dead bracken intermixed with ling and benty grasses, swept out and up to the sky that was big with sunrise and with storm. The wind blew cold and shrill, and all was empty loneliness; but to Nance it seemed that she was in a friendly land, where she was free to breathe. They would not let her fight for the true cause; she had no skill in arms; but here, on the naked, friendly heath, she was free at least to grasp the meaning of that stormy hardship which her folk had been content to undergo.

There was Sir Jasper—her father, and many who had ridden out from the Loyal Meet at Windyhough under her own eyes—and all of them had seemed instinct with this large, stormy air that lay above the moors. She was girlish yet, healthy and in need of pleasure; and she had wondered, seeing these men ride from Windyhough, that they were so grave about the matter, intent and quiet, as if they went to kirk instead of to the wars. Like Rupert, she had pictured the scene in more vivid colours, had been impatient that no music of the pipes, no rousing cheers had gone to the farewell. She had longed for the strong lights and shades of drama, and had found instead a workaday company of gentlemen who rode about their business and made no boast of it.

Here on the wintry heights she looked life in the face to-day. These men who had ridden out—Sir Jasper turning only at the last moment to kiss his wife, though he was deep

in love with her at the end of many years—had been rugged and silent as the hills that had nursed their strength and loyalty.

Nance was not herself just now. The superstitious would have said that she was "seeing far." And so she was—far as the red sunrise-glow that reached up to heaven. She and the moors, between them, struck sparks of vivid faith from the winter's barrenness and hardship. She was sure that summer would return, fragrant with the scent of Stuart roses.

They had reached the top of Hangman's Snout, she and her broken-winded horse. And suddenly a doubt came blowing down the breeze to her. Will Underwood had been absent from the Loyal Meet. She was aware that men doubted him in some subtle manner that did not need words to explain its meaning. He was popular, in a haphazard way, with his own kind; but always, as Nance looked back along the years, there was a suggestion that he was happier among the women, because he had the gift of fooling them. And yet men admitted that he was a good companion in all field-sports—and yet again Nance remembered how, not long ago, she had overheard her father talking with Oliphant of Muirhouse, when they did not guess that she was within earshot.

"Will Underwood will join us," Squire Roger had said, with the testiness of a man who only half believes his own words. "He takes any fence that comes."

"Yes," Oliphant had broken in, with the dry smile of one who knew his world. "Yes, he can gallop well. Can he stand a siege, though?"

"A siege?"

"There's not always a game fox in front, Squire—and hounds running with a fine, full-throated cry. I'm on the other side o' life myself—the long night rides, when a man would barter all for one clean fight in open daylight. Underwood will not find this march such a gallop. Horse and foot

go together, and the roads are vile. Can he last, Squire, crawling at a foot pace?"

Nance remembered the very tone of Oliphant's voice—the dry, sharp challenge in it, as of one who had learned to sum up a man's character quickly. It was her own judgment of Will Underwood, though warm liking for him—his bigness and his way of taking fences—had stifled half her healthy common sense.

She checked her horse, looked out across this land of wintry nakedness. It was here on the uplands that she had let Underwood steal into her friendship, here that her quick need for romance had shaped him to the likeness of a gentleman—gallant, debonair, a man to count on whether peace or war were in the doing.

Something of the wind's free-roving heedlessness took hold of her. She was free to choose her man, free to be loyal to her heart and let her judgment go.

She looked down the slope. A horseman came suddenly into view, riding up the trough of the hills. She checked her horse, with a sharp, instinctive cry. The superstitions of the moor, bred in its lonely marshes and voiced by its high priests, the curlews and the plover, crept round her like the hill-mists that bewilder human judgment. Will Underwood was away with the Stuart, riding south to London and the Restoration; yet he was coming up to meet her, over the slopes which they had crossed together on many a hunting-day.

She watched him climb the slope. There was no mistaking the dashing, handsome figure, the way he had of sitting a horse; and the wide emptiness of the heath, its savage loneliness, seemed only to make bigger this intruder who rode up into its silence.

The old, unconquerable legends of the moor returned to Nance. Her nurse had taught her, long ago, what such apparitions meant. The dead were allowed to return to those they loved, for the brief hour before the soul, half between heaven and earth, took its last departure.

She watched the horseman ride nearer, nearer. And suddenly she broke into a flood of tears. He had died in battle—had died for the Stuart—and was riding up, a ghostly horseman on a phantom steed, to tell her of it. He had died well—yes—but she would miss him in the coming years. She would miss him—

Again she thought of Rupert. All his life the Scholar had been struggling against impotence and misery. He had grown used to it by habit; and, of all her friends, she longed most to have him by her side, because he would understand this trouble that unsteadied her.

Will Underwood's wraith came up and up the track. She drooped in the saddle of the broken-winded horse, and hid her eyes, and waited for the kiss, cold as an east wind over the marshes, that would tell her he was loyal in the dying. The tales of nursery days were very close about her now, and she was a child who walked in the unknown.

"Why, Nance, what the devil is amiss? You're crying like a burn in spate."

Will's voice was sharp and human. Nance reined back a pace or two. They were so near, so big, Will and his horse, that they shattered her nursery tales with bewildering roughness.

For a while she could not speak, could not check the sobs which were a tribute, not to the living man but to his wraith. Then she gathered up her strength, for she came of a plucky stock. Will Underwood was good at reading women's faces; it was his trade in life; but he could make nothing of Nance just now. Her glance was searching, her eyes quiet and hard, though tears were lying on her lashes still. All her world had slipped from under her. There seemed no longer any trust, or faith, or happiness in the bleak years to come; but at least she had her pride.

"Nance, what is it?" he asked.

"I thought you a ghost just now, Mr. Underwood—the ghost of your better self, may be. And now——"

"Well, and now?" he broke in, with the hardy self-assurance that had served him well in days gone by. "I'm alive, and entirely at your service, Nance. Surely there's no occasion for distress in that."

She looked gravely at him for a moment, with clear eyes that seemed to glance through and beyond him, as if his handsome body and his strength had disappeared, leaving only a puff of unsubstantial wind behind.

"There *is* occasion," she said, very gravely and in a voice that was musical with pain and steadfastness. "You had better be lying dead, Mr. Underwood, along some road of loyalty, than—than be idling here, when other men are fighting."

He reddened, seemed at a loss for words. Then, "Nance, what a child you are—and I fancied you a woman grown," he said, with an attempt at playfulness. "What is this Rising, after all? A few Scots ragamuffins following a laddie with yellow hair and flyaway wits. Let the women sing ballads, and dream dreams; but level-headed men don't risk all on moonshine of that sort."

"My father—he is older than you, and is counted—more level-headed, shall we say? Sir Jasper Royd, too, is a soldier whose record all men know. *They* have gone with the ragamuffins and the yellow-haired laddie."

Underwood was startled by the quiet irony, the security, that were instinct in the girl's voice, her bearing. She was not the wayward, pleasure-loving Nance he had known; she stood, in some odd way, for all the pride and all the resolution of her race. He had earned his title of "Wild Will" by taking fences which men more sensitively built refused to hazard, and by more doubtful exploits which were laughed at and avoided by the cleaner sort among his comrades. He was good to look at, gay and dominant; yet never, to his life's end, would he lay hold of the subtle meaning which those of an old race attach to that one word "loyalty." It was not his fault that his father had been of slight account, except for

a gift of money-making; but he had not cared to learn the lessons which the second generation must, if it wished to lay hold of old tradition and make itself a home among the great-hearted, simple gentlemen of Lancashire.

He and Nance were alone here on the uplands. A ragged, crimson sunset lingered over the moor. A cock-grouse got up from the heather on their right, and whirred down the bitter wind, chuckling harshly as it went. It was a man's land, this, full of hills that stepped, sleety and austere, to the red of the stormy sky. A man should have been easily the master here; and yet Underwood knew that he was dwarfed, belittled, by this slim lass of Demaine's, whose eyes held truth and looked him through and through.

"Your excuse, Mr. Underwood?" asked Nance, in a tone as wintry as the hills.

He should have known, from the quiet and hungry longing in her face, from the shiver that took her unawares, though the wind's cold had no part in it, how eagerly she waited for his answer. He had shared her dreams. He had captured a liking that was very near to love; and she was defending the last ditch of her faith in him. If he could make amends, even now—and surely he must, he who was so big and strong—if he could give her one sudden, inspired word that would unravel all the tangle—she was ready to believe in him.

Instead, Will laughed like a country hobbledoey. "My excuse—why, prudence, Nance; and prudence, they say, is a quiet mare to ride or drive at all times. I'll join your Rising when there's a better chance of its success. There were few rode out from Lancashire, after all; I've met many a stay-at-home good fellow already since I returned from the business that took me south."

He regretted the words as soon as they were spoken. Her tone, her contemptuous air of question, had stung him. Until now he had assumed the manners worn by these people

into whose midst his father had intruded, had carried lip-service to the Stuart passably enough, had won his way by conformity to the letter of their deep traditions. And here and now, on the moor that would have none of lies, he had plucked the mask aside, so that Nance shrank back a little in the saddle, afraid of the meanness in his face.

There was a silence, broken only by the wind's fret, by the ripple of a neighbouring stream whose floods were racing banktop high. With sharp insistence, one memory came to Nance. She recalled how, weeks ago, she had left Rupert and his brother to their fight, had ridden down to Demaine House with Will, had found her father eager as a boy because Oliphant of Muirhouse had brought news of the Rising. She recalled, too, how Underwood had seemed cold, how he had followed her out into the hall and answered her distrust of him. And she had listened to his pleading—had bidden him come before the month was out, if he were leal—if *he were leal*.

The moor, and the frost that made rose-pink and amber of the sunset sky, were very cold to Nance just now. If she had felt distrust of this big, loose-built ruffler, she had been willing enough to let first love cover up her doubts. She had cared for what he might have been, and had been concerned each day to hide the traces of what, in sober fact, he was. For a moment it seemed to her that pride, and strength, and all, had left her. It was hard and bitter to know that something warmer, gayer than she had known as yet, had gone from her, not to return.

Then courage came to her again, borrowed from the hard-riding days that had fathered many generations of her race. "Mr. Underwood," she said, not looking at him, "you picked up my kerchief not long ago—do you remember?—and asked to keep it."

Even now he could not rid himself of the easy hunting days, the easy conquests, which had built up a wall of self-

security about him. "You'll give it me before the month is out, Nance? You promised it," he said, edging his horse nearer hers.

Nance took a kerchief from the pocket of her riding-coat. "Why, yes," she said, "I keep my word. You may claim it."

He took it, put it to his lips, all with the over-done effrontery of a groom who finds the master's daughter stooping to him. "I shall keep it," he said—"until the next true Rising comes."

"Yes," said Nance submissively. "You may keep it, Mr. Underwood."

"Nay, call me Will!" he blundered on. "Listen, Nance. When I spoke of prudence just now, I—I lied. You stung me into saying what I did not mean. There were reasons kept me here. You'll believe me, surely? Urgent reasons. And here I am, eating my heart out while other men are taking happy risks."

Nance glanced once at him. His voice was persuasive as of old; he had the same easy seat in saddle, the handsome, dash-away figure that had given him a certain romantic place of his own among his intimates; but there was something new. She understood, with sudden humiliation and self-pity, how slight a thing first love may be. And, because he had forced this knowledge on her, she would not spare him.

"You may keep it," she repeated. "The enemy may come to Windyhough, and you will need a flag of truce, as the old men and the disabled will—and my kerchief—it will serve as well as another."

She was alone with him, here on the empty moor, and had only a broken-winded horse to help her if need asked. Yet her disdain of him was so complete, her humiliation so bitter, that she had no fear. She spoke slowly, quietly; and Underwood reined his horse back a little, as if she had struck him with her riding-whip.

"All this because I'll not risk my head for a wild-cat plot to put a Stuart on the throne?"

"Oh, not for that reason. Because you promised to risk your head; because, in time of peace, you persuaded loyal gentlemen that you were one of them; because, Mr. Underwood, you ran away before you had ever seen the enemy."

Nance's one desire was to hurt this man, to get through his armour of good living and complacency; it was her way—the woman's way—of digging a grave in which to hide the first love that was dead, unlovely, pitiful.

"Well, we hunted yesterday," said the other doggedly. "There were plenty of Lancashire gentlemen in my own case—our heads sounder than our hearts—and we had fine sport. And, coming home—you'll forgive me—we laughed at Sir Jasper and his handful of enthusiasts. We like them—we shall miss them when they're gibbeted in London—but we laughed at their old-fashioned view of honour. Honour trims pretty rosettes for a man to wear, but doesn't save his head. Honour's a woman's pastime, Miss Demaine."

Nance looked at him with frank astonishment. This man knew that her own father was of Sir Jasper's company, that she was troubled, like all stay-at-homes, lest ill news should come. And he chose this time to defend himself by confessing that he and others had laughed at better men. And he talked of Tower Hill.

"When the gentlemen of Lancashire return—when the Prince has come to his own, and England is free again and happy—what then, Mr. Underwood? It will go ill, I think, with masqueraders."

They faced each other, the man insolent, ungroomed—true to his breed, as folk are apt to be in time of stress—Nance in that mood of hot fury and contempt which is cool and debonair.

"What then?" he said, stroking his horse's neck. "The Vicar of Bray was a very good man of the world, after all, and he prospered. We shall toast the Stuart openly; it will save all that clumsy ritual of passing the wine across the water."

Nance was healthy, eager, human. She shrank, with an odd, childish loathing, from this man who counted the world—the big, gallant world of faith, and strife, and loyalty—as a dining-table, no more, no less, where wise men took their ease. She gathered the reins into her hand, turned in saddle.

"Keep the kerchief, sir," she said gently. "As I told you, you will need it when"—her voice broke suddenly, against her will—"when our men come home from the crowning."

And then she left him. He watched her go down the slope on her fiddle-headed nag. All his buoyancy was gone. He had been spoiled by flattery, of word and glance; he had been accustomed to be taken at his surface value, giving his friends little opportunity to test whether he rang true or not. And now he was like a pampered child that meets its first rebuff. His pluck had left him. He had no heart to follow Nance, though by and by he would regret the lost opportunity to claim rough satisfaction for her handling of him. She had spoken, with such security and pride, of the loyalty that was an instinct with her. Her men who had ridden out were of the like mind; and Underwood, in a flash of enlightenment and dismay, saw how the coming days would go with him if this haphazard venture of the Prince's carried him to London and the throne. His comfortable house of Underwood, his easy life, the dinners and the hunting and the balls—all would have to be given up. He had no illusions now as to his power to continue here among them, explaining his share in the enterprise, winning his way back to favour by excellence in field sports and in ladies' parlours. If the Prince came to his own, there would be an end of Wild Will, so far as loyal Lancashire was concerned; for at every turn he would have to meet the scorn that Nance had given him so unsparingly to-day.

Nance looked back once, when she was half down the slope, and saw him sitting rigid in the saddle, horse and man showing in clear, lonely outline against the rainy sky. He would be himself again to-morrow, for shallowness can

never suffer long; but she would have pitied him, may be, could she have guessed his bitter loneliness just now. Shorn of his self-love, Nance lost beyond hope of regaining—instinct told him so much—alive to the cowardice which no longer wore the more pleasant air of prudence, Underwood looked out on lands as forlorn as himself; and, far down the slope, he saw Nance's little figure, and knew that, in some odd way that was better than himself, he loved this trim lass of Demaine's.

Nance reached the lower lands, where the bridle-track ran in and out beside the swollen streams, past coppices where the trees were comely in their winter's nakedness. She saw each line and furrow of the pastures, remembered they had found a fox last month in the spinney yonder, recalled how she and Rupert had fished the brook together, just where it ran under the grey stone bridge below her. All her faculties seemed to be sharpened, rather than deadened, by the blow, pitiless and hard, that Will had given her just now. Her first love—the delicate and fragrant thing that had been interwoven with her waking and her dreaming hours—had died shamefully. She could not even bring a decent show of grief to the graveside; her only feeling was that it should be buried, in the middle of a dark midwinter's night, out of all men's sight and gossip.

And, in this hour of swift and unexpected trouble, she was as her father and her brothers would have had her be—unflinching, reliant, reaching out instinctively to the strong morrow, not to the dead, unlovely yesterday. Only, she was very tired; and there was one friend she needed—a friend who could not come and put warm, human arms about her, because her mother had died long ago, leaving her to the care of men who love and honour and defend their women, but who are weak to understand their times of loneliness.

She was a great figure, after all, this daughter of Demaine's who rode on a broken-winded horse through the fieldways that had bred her. It is easy to ride forward, head erect, into

the city you have taken by assault; but it is hard to carry upright shoulders and a firm, disdainful head, when only faith and the clean years behind support you in the thick of grave disaster.

At the bend of the track, where it passed Sunderland's cornmill—the water-wheel treading its sleepy round—she saw Rupert and Simon Foster twenty yards ahead. Simon was carrying a couple of muskets, his pockets bulging with powder-flasks and lead, and Rupert was limping a little, as if he had given too much work to his damaged ankle; and Nance Demaine, who was in the mood that sees all and understands, knew, from the look of Rupert's back, that he was pleased with the day's adventure.

Her horse was tired now, and for the last mile she had ridden him at a gentle foot pace. The track was heavy with wet leaves that waited for a drying wind to scatter them. The two on foot did not hear the muffled splash of hoofs, and she was content to follow them.

She had been friendless; and now half her loneliness had slipped away from her, at sight of Rupert limping on ahead. He was more diffident than she, more sensitive to ridicule and hardship; but he stood for the truths that matter in a world where men and women are ready, for the most part, to believe that all ends when death robs them of the power to eat, and sleep, and dance foolishly from day to day, like gnats when the sun is warm about them. He stood for her own simple, downright view of creed and honour; he was a comrade of the true breed, in brief, and she was in sore need of companionship just now.

How well she seemed to know this cripple who jogged on before her! Half-forgotten words of his; little, unselfish surrenders when Maurice had shown a younger brother's wilfulness; the patient chivalry that had bidden him show deference to Lady Royd when her tongue was lashing his infirmities—all these stood out with startling clearness. And again that curious, sharp pain was at her heart, and the old

thought returned how good a knight was lost to Prince Charles Edward.

They were near the gate of Windyhough now, and Rupert, hearing hoofs behind him at last, turned quickly. The familiar eagerness came to his face at sight of her—the instant pleasure, followed by a hint of pain; the homage that was there to be read plainly by any onlooker.

"So this is the King's business you have been about?" said Nance, looking down at him with a tenderness that set his blood on fire.

"Why, yes. I said there was no mystery about it. Since you told me you could not trust your men to shoot straight——"

"Oh, Rupert, I was foolish; I did not mean it. I was out of heart that day, and temper got the better of me."

"But it was true. I had fancied that, if the attack came, it would be enough to fire one's musket and trust to Providence for marksmanship. It was a daft thought, Nance, was it not? It was shirking trouble."

Nance got down from the saddle, gave the reins to Simon Foster. "Take him to the stable, Simon," she said. "He has carried me well, and deserves a double feed." She wished to be alone with Rupert and the other's presence seemed an irritating check on speech. And yet, when Simon had left them, they stood looking at each other in troubled silence. Each was in a tense, restless mood, and their trouble only gathered weight by the companionship.

"Did you find it hard—this learning how to shoot?" she asked at last.

"It was easier than knowing you could not trust me, Nance, to guard you." The old, whimsical self-derision was in his voice. He had learned at least to carry his hurts bravely.

And she could find no words. There was some quality in Rupert—of manliness—that touched her now with an emotion deep and poignant, and clean as tempered steel.

"The pity of it!" she murmured, after another long, un-

easy silence. "To prepare so well for an attack that cannot come—"

"But it may come, Nance. These last days—I cannot tell you why—I have not felt that all was make-believe, as I did at first."

"How should it come, Rupert? They are so far away—near London, surely, now—"

"How will it come? I do not know. But I know that I have asked for it—asked patiently, Nance—and faith must be answered one day."

"My dear," she said, "you are so—so oddly staunch, and so unpractical." And her voice broke, and she could get no farther.

And Rupert smiled gravely, touched her hand, as a courtier might, and limped up toward the house.

Nance stood there awhile, with long thoughts for company. Then, seeking a respite from her mood, she crossed the stables to give a carrot to the fiddle-headed horse; but she got no farther than the corner of the yard. At the stable-door, deaf to all sounds from the outward world and careless of the many windows looking out on them, Simon Foster and Martha were standing hand in hand. Martha's face was rose-red and smiling, her lover's full of an amazing foolishness.

"There's the bonnie, snod lass you are, Martha!" Simon was declaring. "I never thought to see such a day as this. Why didn't I think of it before, like?"

"Perhaps you were blind, Simon," put in the other, with a coy upward glance.

Nance retreated out of eye-shot, and for the moment she forgot her troubles. She just laughed until her eyes were wet and her slim little body shook. The scene was so unexpected, so instinct with sheer humour, that the gravest must have yielded to it. Then, as the pressure of the last ill-fated days returned to her, she was filled with a childish wonder that life should be so muddled, so rough-and-tumble, so

seemingly disordered. There was Sir Jasper, conquering or defeated, but either way carrying his life in his hands. There was Windyhough itself—house, lands and all—at stake. And yet Simon and the dairymaid, whose discretion now, if ever, should have ripened, were reading folly in each other's eyes.

She heard Martha cross, singing, to the kitchen, and turned and sought the stables again. She was anxious to learn something which only Simon could tell her; for Rupert was diffident of his own skill at all times, and would not have given her, had she asked it, a true account of his marksmanship.

Simon was brushing down the horse when she went in. He glanced up with grave, stolid innocence, as if he had had no other occupation than this of grooming.

"What has the master learned in these last days?" she asked abruptly. "Does he aim well, Simon?"

"He shapes grandly; but then, he always does when his mind is fair set on a matter. We were in a lonely spot, too, you see, with none to laugh at him while he made his first mistakes."

Nance stroked the fiddle-headed nag, and watched him munch his carrot, and seemed glad to linger here.

"He can hit his man now, you think?"

"Well, I reckon if I were the man, I'd as lief be out of range as in. I tell you, the young master does naught by halves. The trouble is to get him started. You'd best come with us when we go out again this afternoon, and shoot a match with him."

And by and by Nance went indoors with a light step and a sense of betterment. It was pleasant to hear Rupert praised.

CHAPTER X

HOW THE PIPES PLAYED DREARILY

WHILE the Lancashire farmers were watering their cattle, milking them, tending the sheep whose fleeces were the great part of their livelihood; while Lady Royd and Nance were querulous because they had a roof above their heads, and fires in the house, and food in plenty; while Rupert went doggedly about his drill of musket-practice, with a heart yearning for the battles he pictured in the doing London way, the Prince's army came to Derby—came in the dusk of a wild November day, with wind-driven rain across their faces, and every house-roof running wet.

Derby was no fine town to see. It was commonplace and dull, to the verge of dreariness. But, to those who marched into it to-day on the Stuart's business, it stood ever afterwards for a place of tragedy—tragedy so poignant and so swift that it gathered round its mean, ill-ordered streets a glamour not its own—the glamour of the might-have-been.

Sir Jasper Royd, neither then nor afterwards, could piece together the tumult and unrest that troubled those two days they spent at Derby. He knew that Lord Murray was querulous, his temper shrewish; he saw the Prince move abroad with unconquerable courage, but with the look in his eyes that Skye men have when the sad mists hide the sun from them. He was aware that some big issue, known only to the leaders, was calling for prompt decision. For the rest, he wondered that loyal gentlemen had any thought but one—to march on where Prince Charles Edward chose to lead.

Once—it was on the second morning of their halt at Derby—he met Lord Murray face to face in the street.

"You look trim and happy, Sir Jasper," said Murray, uneasy in his greeting since the duel he had fought with this odd gentleman from Lancashire.

"My faith commands it. I obey. What else?" growled the older man.

"Then you're lucky in your creed," drawled the other—"or in your obedience. Few gentlemen of the Prince's could find a smile to-day, as you do, if their heads depended on it. Give me the trick of it, sir," he went on, with clumsy raillery. "When all is lost—when we're trapped like foxes, with three armies closing in upon us—you take your snuff-box out, and dust your nostrils, and smile as if these cursed Midlands were a garden."

Sir Jasper's distrust of the man yielded to a slow, unwilling pity. He had so much, as he counted riches, and Murray was so destitute, so in need of alms, that he spoke with quiet friendliness, as if he taught a child that two and two, since time's beginning, added up to four.

"All the world's a garden, to those who hold the Faith," he said slowly, searching for the one right word to express what was plain to him as the road to London. "When all seems losing, or lost altogether—are you so town-bred that you do not know the darkest hour comes just before the dawn—the dawn, if a man can keep himself in hand and wait for it?"

"Your sentiments, Sir Jasper, do you credit," sneered Murray, stung by the sheer strength, the reality, of this man's outlook upon life. "They should be written, in a round, fair hand, at the head of all good children's copybooks. For ourselves, we are men—and living in a rough-and-ready world—and we know there are some dark hours that never lift to dawn."

"There are none," said Sir Jasper bluntly. "Believe me, I talk of what I know. The black night always lifts."

Murray strode forward impatiently, turned back, regarded the other with an evasive glance. It was plain that, what-

ever was his errand down Derby's rainy main-street, he brought a harassed mind to it. "You may be proved, sir, sooner than you think. Suppose this Rising failed. Suppose we were crushed like a hazel-nut between these three converging armies; suppose the Prince were taken, and we with him, would you stand on Tower Hill and say the dawn was coming?"

"My lord Murray," the other answered gravely, "we none of us know, until the hour, whether our courage will prove equal to our needs. But I say this. If I'm the man I've drilled myself to be, if I can keep my eyes clear as they are now—I will stand with you on Tower Hill, and you will know that the dawn is very near to me."

"Gad, sir, you're tough!" growled Murray. Piety had shown to him till now as a dour, forbidding thing that made fools or fanatics of men. He had not understood—though the Highlanders should have taught him so much—that it could be instinct with romance, and warmth, and well-being, making endeavour and sacrifice a soldier's road to the steep hill-tops of the certain dawn.

"I've need to be," said Sir Jasper, with the same unalterable simplicity. "There are too many weak-kneed folk with us." There was a pause, and he looked Murray in the face as he had done just before their duel in the wood. "You go to the Prince's Council?" he went on.

"Well, since you've guessed as much—yes."

"And you will air your knowledge of arithmetic—will argue that all's lost already according to the known rules of warfare. No, you need not disclaim. We know your mind. My lord, I am in command only of a ragged company from Lancashire, and not privileged to share your Council. But I ask you to listen to a plain gentleman's view of this adventure. We follow no known rules, save that the straight road is the readiest. We have one thought only—of advance. There is the London road open to us, and no other, and God for-

give you if you sound the note of retreat that will ruin all."

"My good Sir Jasper, my mind was made up long ago. The world's as it's made, and battle is a crude reckoning up of men, and arms, and odds——"

"And the something more that you will not understand—the something that has carried us to Derby, as by a miracle. Listen, my lord! I ask you to listen. You go to this Council. In an hour or so all will be settled, one way or the other. Remember that you Highland chiefs have the Stuart's honour in your hands, the lives of all these simple Highlanders. You know that the Prince has one mind only—to push forward—but that you can overrule him if you will." Sir Jasper's voice was strained and harsh, so eager was he to bring his voice to the Council, if only by deputy. "You know, Lord Murray, that the Highlanders are with their Prince, in thought, in faith, in eagerness to run the gauntlet. You know, too, that your Scots tradition bids them, liking it or no, follow their chieftains first, their Prince afterwards."

"I am well aware of it. That is the weapon I mean to make full use of, since you compel my candour."

It was a moment when men are apt to find unsuspected, gusty feelings stir and cry for outlet. For neither to Sir Jasper nor Lord Murray was there any doubt that the whole well-being of England—England, thrifty, pleasant, mistress of the seas, and royalist to the core of her strong, tender heart—rested on this Council that was soon to make its choice between opposing policies. And Lord Murray, in his own cold fashion, believed that he was the wise counsellor of the enterprise, enforcing prudence on hot-headed zealots; for Murray was three parts honest, though he was cursed from birth by lack of breadth and that practical, high imagination which makes fine leaders.

"I am sorry," said Sir Jasper unexpectedly. "Till you die, Lord Murray, you'll regret your share in this. You've gained many to your side, and may carry what you have in

mind; but, if you have your way, I'd rather die on Tower Hill than lie on the bed you're making for yourself. You'll think better of it?" he broke off, with a quick tenderness that surprised him. "You're brave, you're capable; surely you will see the open road to London as I see it now—the only road of honour. For your own sake—"

"For my own sake?" snapped Murray, moved against his will. "Why should you care so much, sir, for what concerns my happiness?"

And then again Sir Jasper did not know his mood, was not master of the words that found their own heedless outlet. "Why? Because, perhaps, we fought together—long ago, it seems—because the man who wins a duel has always some queer, tender liking for his adversary. My lord Murray, I would wish to see you a strong man in this Council—strong as the Prince himself. I wish—dear God! I wish to ride the London road beside you, forgetting we once quarrelled."

Murray's face was hard as ever, but he was moved at last. This Lancashire squire, whose strength could not be bought, or tamed, or killed by ridicule, had found a way through all defences of prudence and arithmetic. It was the moment, had they known it, when the whole fate of the Rising was at issue; for the great councils are shaped often by those hap-hazard meetings in the streets that sway men's moods beforehand.

And, as it chanced, Lochiel came swinging down the street, on his way to join the Council—Lochiel, with his lean, upright body, his gaiety, not lightly won, that made sunshine between the mean, grey house-fronts—Lochiel, his wet kilt swinging round his knees, and in his face the strong, tender light that is bred of the big hills and the big, northern storms.

Murray glanced up the street, saw Lochiel. All finer impulses were killed, as if a blight had fallen on them; for Murray was ridden by the meanest of the sins, and was an abject slave to jealousy.

Lochiel halted, and the three of them passed the time of

day together, guardedly, knowing what was in the issue, and reticent.

"You come in a good hour, Lochiel," said Murray, with the disdain that had never served him well. "Sir Jasper here has been talking moonshine and high Faith. You'll be agreed."

Lochiel stood, just himself, schooled by hardship to a chivalry that few men learn. "I think on most points we're agreed, Sir Jasper and I. It is a privilege to meet these gentlemen of Lancashire; they know their mind and speak it. They'll not be bought, Murray, not even by Dame Prudence, whose lap you sit in."

So then Murray's chilliness took fire. There was need, even in his sluggish veins, to set the troubles of this venture right by casual quarrels.

"When we find leisure, I shall seek satisfaction, Lochiel; you'll not deny it me."

And Lochiel laughed gently. "Dear Murray, I ask nothing better. The only trouble is that we'll be dead, the two of us, long before the promised meeting, if you have your way with the Council that is going to end old England or to mend her."

"I shall have my way," growled the other, and passed down the street.

Lochiel put his arm on Sir Jasper's shoulder. He had no gaiety now; his heart was aching, and he spoke as friend to friend. "I believe him," he said quietly. "Murray had always the gift of rallying doubters round him. The Duke of Perth is staunch. Elcho is staunch, and a few others. For the rest, they've been tempted by this glib talk of strategy. Murray has persuaded them that we've marched to Derby simply to retreat in good order; that we shall do better to fall back on some imaginary host of friends who happened to be late for the Rising, and who are eager now to join us."

"Retreat?" snapped Sir Jasper. "The devil coined that

word, Lochiel. Murray's shrewd and a Scotsman and no coward; he should know that the good way lies forward always."

And then Lochiel, because he was so heart-sick and so tired of strategy, fell into that light mood which touches men at times when they're in danger of breaking under stress of feeling.

"I can only think of one case where your gospel fails," he said, with the quick, boyish smile that sat oddly on his harassed face. "Retreat in good order, sir, has been known to carry honour with it."

"I know of none, Lochiel," insisted the other, in his down-right way.

"Oh, Potiphar's wife, perhaps. And, there, Sir Jasper, you think me flippant; and I tell you that my heart is as near to breaking as any Hielandman's in Derby. It is a queer, disastrous pain, this heartbreak." Lochiel's shoulders drooped a little. The wind came raving down the street and made him shiver as with ague. Then his weakness passed, and he lifted his trim, buoyant head to any hardship that was coming. "Fools' hearts may break," he said sharply. "For me, I'll see this trouble through. I'll find a glimpse of blue sky somewhere; aye, Sir Jasper, though Murray sets the darkness of the pit about us."

The two men looked gravely at each other, as comrades do. They were of the like unalterable faith; they were chilled by this constant drag upon a march that, left to the leader of it, would have gone forward blithely.

Most of all, perhaps, they felt the weakness that was the keystone of their whole position. The Highlanders were eager for the Prince, would have laid down their lives for him, wished only for the forward march and the battle against odds; but, deep in those hidden places of the soul where the far-back fathers have planted legacies, they were obedient to the tradition that a Highlandman follows his own

chief, though the King himself bids him choose a happier and more pleasant road.

Lochiel knew this, as a country squire knows the staunch virtues, whims, and failings of his tenantry; and because his knowledge was so sure, he feared the issue of this Council. Murray could never have won the rank and file; but he had captured the most part of the chiefs, who had been leading too easy lives these late days and had softened to the call of prudence. And the Council, in its view of it, had come already to a decision shameful and disastrous.

"Sir Jasper," said Lochiel suddenly, "we go pitying ourselves, and that is always waste of time. What of the Prince? I cannot tell you the love—the love proven to the hilt—I have for him. We give our little to this rising; but he, brave soul, gives all. No detail of our men's comfort in this evil weather, no cheery word when the world goes very ill with us, has been neglected. And, above the detail—oh, above the detail that frets his nerves to fiddle-strings—he keeps the single goal ahead. He keeps the bridge of faith, Sir Jasper, with a gallantry that makes me weak about my mother's knees again, as if—as if I did not need to be ashamed of tears."

Sir Jasper passed a hand across his eyes. He had kept, through the rough journey of his sixty years, a passionate devotion to the Stuart; and he had travelled with Prince Charles Edward, as wayfarers do with wayfarers, through sleety roads, and had found, as few men do, that his fine, chivalrous ideal was less than the reality. "I've been near his Highness often," he said slowly. "He kept his temper firm on the rein when I could not have done. He went about the camp o' nights, when most of his gentry were asleep, and tended ailing Highlanders. He's as big as Pendle Hill in Lancashire; and, Lochiel, keep a good heart through this Council, for he was cast in a bigger mould than most of us."

"He—is royal," said Lochiel softly. "That is all. Put him in peasant's homespun, with his lovelocks shorn, he'd be still—why, just the Stuart, reigning from the hilltops over us."

"And, Lochiel, you talked of heartbreak. We're lesser men, and can jog along somehow if the worst comes. The Prince cannot. The heart of him—it's like a well-grown oak, Lochiel; it will stand upright to the storm, or it will break. There is no middle way."

So then Lochiel remembered he would be late for the Council if he stayed longer in the windy street. "There never was a middle way," he said. "You, sir—and the Prince, God bless him!—and Lochiel of the many weaknesses, we never trod the middle way."

And somehow a great sorrow and great liking came to them, as if they were brothers parting in the thick of a stormy night where ways divided.

"We shall meet soon again," said Lochiel, the foolish trouble in his voice. "And, either way this Council goes, we'll find a strip of blue sky over us, Sir Jasper."

He swung down the street, his head upright and his figure lithe and masterful. He might, to all outward seeming, have been going to his own wedding. For that was Lochiel's way when hope and courage were at their lowest ebb, when he conquered his weakness by disdaining it.

And Sir Jasper watched him go—watched other chieftains hurrying, with grave, set faces, to the Council. And then, for three long hours, he paced the streets. What Rupert, his heir, was learning there at Windyhough the father learned during this time of waiting for the news. The chiefs were in the thick of debate, were speaking out their minds, were guessing, from the shifting issues of the Council, which way the wind was sitting. They were in the fighting-line at least; but he, whose heart was centred wholly on this Council that would settle all, was compelled to stand by helpless to serve his Prince by word or deed.

He was not alone. It was an open secret that, behind the closed doors of the Council Chamber, men were deciding whether retreat or advance should be the day's marching-order. Discipline was ended for awhile. The Highlanders could not rest in their lodgings, but stood about the streets in crowds, or in little knots, seeking what make-believe Derby town could give them of the free air and the big, roomy hills that, in gladness or in sorrow, were needful to them as the food they ate. The townsfolk, stirred from their sleepiness by all this hubbub of tattered, rain-sodden men who were bent on some errand dimly understood, mixed with the soldiery, and asked foolish questions, and got few answers, because the most part of the army spoke only Gaelic.

The whole town, though men's voices were low and hushed, was alive with that stress of feeling which is like a brewing thunderstorm. Men gathered into crowds, saying little, affect each other, till each feels in his own person the sum total of his neighbour's restlessness; and for that reason armies yield suddenly to a bewildering panic, or to a selfless courage that leads to high victories in face of odds.

The wind swept down the streets of Derby. The rain was tireless. It did not matter. To Sir Jasper—to the men of Lancashire, and the Highlandmen who were old to sorrow of the hills—there was nothing mattered, save the news for which they waited. And the time dragged on. And still the Council doors were shut.

Then, late in the afternoon, Lord Murray came out, and walked up the street, with half a dozen of his intimates beside him. And, a little later, Lochiel came out, alone, and, after him, the Duke of Perth, alone. And Sir Jasper, standing near the Council Chamber, knew at a glance which side had won the day.

Last of all—a long while after, so it seemed to Sir Jasper—the Prince crossed the threshold, stood for a moment, as if stunned, with the rain and the spiteful wind against his cheek. He was like one grown old before his time—one bent and

broken up by some disaster that had met his manhood by the way.

Then, as Lochiel had done when he went down the street to this unhappy Council, the Prince lifted his head, squared his shoulders to the wind, and stepped out between the silent bystanders as if life were a jest to him. So then Sir Jasper was sure that retreat was the order of the day; was sure, too, that his Prince had never shown so simple and conspicuous a gallantry as he did now, when he moved through the people as if he went to victory, not to a heartache that would last him till he lay, dead and at peace, beside his Stuart kinsmen.

At dawn of the next day the retreat began. It was a red dawn and a stormy, though the rain had ceased, and the wisp of a dying moon was lying on her back above the dismal house-tops.

The Prince stood aside and watched it all. A little while before he had bidden Lord Murray ride at the head of the outgoing army. "I have no strategy, my lord," he had said, with chiselled irony. "I lead only when attack comes from the front." And Sir Jasper, with the instinct of old loyalty and new-found, passionate liking for the man, had drawn his own horse near to the Prince's bridle; and they waited, the two of them, till the sad procession passed, as if to burial of their finest hopes.

Not till Derby's life is ended will she hear such trouble and such master-music as went up and down her streets on that disastrous, chilly dawn. The Highlanders were strong and simple-hearted men. They had obeyed their leaders, rather than the Prince who had sounded the forward note of battle. But no old allegiance could silence their pipers, who played a dirge to Prince Charles Edward, heir to the English throne.

By one consent, it seemed, the pipers, as they went by their Prince, played only the one air. Low, insistent, mournful as the mists about their own wild hills, the air roamed up and

down the wet, quiet streets, till it seemed there had been no other music since the world began. There was no hope, no quick compelling glamour, as of old; the pipes, it seemed, were broken-hearted like their leader, and they could only play for sorrow.

Up and down the long, mean street, and down and up, between the wet house-fronts that reared themselves to the dying moon and the red murk of the dawn, the music roamed. And always it was the same air—the dirge known as “The Flowers of the Forest,” which was brought to birth when the Scots lost Flodden Field. Since Flodden, generation after generation, men skilled at the pipes had taught their growing youngsters the way of it; and now the ripe training of the fathers had gathered to a head. No pipers ever played, or ever will again, as those who greeted the Prince as they passed by him—greeted him, with sadness and with music, as heroes salute a comrade proven and well-loved.

The riders and the men on foot went by. The tread of hoofs, the tread of feet, was slow and measured, as the tread of mourners is; and down and up, and up and down, the echoes of the pipes’ lament roamed through Derby’s street. It was an hour—and there are few such—when men, with their strength and their infirmities, and their rooted need of battle, grow tender and outspoken as little children, who have found no need as yet to face life in the open.

The Prince and Sir Jasper were alone. The fighting men had passed them, and the chattering townsfolk. And from afar, down the silence of the empty street, the sorrow of the pipes came with a low, recurring lilt.

Lochiel, not long ago, had sounded the right note. They were children, Sir Jasper and his Prince, gathered round their mothers’ knees again; and, through the murk of Derby’s street, and through the falling sorrow of the music, God spoke to them, as if they needed, in this hour of extreme weakness, to reach out and hold with firm hands the faith that was slipping from their grasp.

And the moment passed, leaving them the sadder, but the stronger for it. And they were men again—comrades, facing a disastrous world. And presently they rode slowly out of Derby, and took the long road north again; and between them fell a silence chill and heavy as the rain that never ceased to whip the puddles of the highway.

"Your eyes are wet, Sir Jasper," said the Prince, turning sharply from the thoughts that were too heavy to be borne.

"So are yours, your Highness," the other answered gruffly.

"Well, then, we'll blame the pipes for it. I think—there's something broken in me, sir, since—since Derby; but no man in my army, except yourself, shall ever guess as much. We shall be gay, Sir Jasper, since need asks."

A few hours later a motley company of horse—three-and-twenty strong—rode into Derby. Some half-dozen of the riders were English, but the rest, and the officer in command, were Hessian soldiery. The officer, one Captain Goldstein, spoke English with some fluency; and his business here, it seemed, was to gather from the townsfolk such details of the retreat as they could furnish.

They spent less than an hour in the town, snatched a hurried meal—for which, unlike the Prince's men, they did not pay—and rode back as fast as they could set hoofs to ground to the main body of the Duke of Cumberland's army, which had been hanging on the rear of the Stuart's men for many days, hoping always to overtake them, and always finding them a few leagues nearer London than themselves.

Captain Goldstein went straight to the Duke's lodgings, and the sentry passed him in without demur when his challenge had been answered.

"Ah, good!" said Cumberland gruffly, looking up from a map which he was studying. "What news from Derby?"

"The best news. They've turned tail, though we could not credit the rumours that came into camp. Derby is empty, your Grace."

The two men were oddly like each other, as they stood in the

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lamplit room. They were big and fleshy, both of them; and each had the thick, loose lips, the heavy jaw, that go with an aggressive lust for the coarser vices, an aggressive ambition, and a cruelty in the handling of all hindrances.

Cumberland drained the tankard at his elbow, thrust his boots a little nearer to the fire-blaze. "What fools these Stuarts are!" he said lazily.

"By your leave, no," said Captain Goldstein, wishing to be exact in detail. "From all I gathered, it was not the Pretender, but the leaders of the clans, who forced the retreat."

"Well, either way, it's laughable. The Elector bars their way at Finchley with ten thousand men; it sounds formidable, Goldstein, eh? but we know what a rotten nut that is to crack. And I could not overtake them; they march with such cursed speed; and poor old Marshal Wade, supposed to be converging from the north, is always a week late for the fair. They held the cards; and, Goldstein, are you jesting when you say that they've retreated?"

"I never jest, your Grace. Derby is empty, I say; and it is not my place to suggest that you order boot-and-saddle to be sounded."

"No," snarled Cumberland, facing round on this officer whom he was wont to kick or caress, according to his mood. "No, Goldstein, it is not your place. Your place? You'd be housed in the kennels if you had your proper lodgings. I rescued you from that sort of neighbourhood, because you seemed to have the makings of a soldier in you."

"They'll retreat with speed, as they advanced. The wind's in the feet of these Highlanders," said Goldstein stubbornly.

"We shall catch them up. To-day I've much to do, Goldstein—an assignation with the miller's buxom daughter, a mile outside the camp; she's waiting for me now."

"She'll wait, sir, till your return. You have that gift with women."

Cumberland stirred lazily, got to his feet. He was pleased by this flattery that was clumsy as his own big, unwholesome

body. "She'll wait, you think? Well, let her wait. Women are best trained that way. There, Goldstein, I was only jesting. You broke the good news too sharply. They've retreated? Say it again. Oh, the fools these Stuarts are! I must drink another measure to their health."

A little later the whole Hanoverian army moved north. Cumberland was keen and happy, because he saw butchery and renown within his grasp. Through days and weeks of hardship over sloppy roads he had hunted the Stuart whom he loathed, had found him constantly elude pursuit. And now, it seemed, his hour of triumph was at hand. And triumph, to his Grace of Cumberland, meant always, not pardon of his enemies, but revenge.

"They leave us a plain track to follow," he said to Goldstein as, near midday, after riding slantwise from their camp to strike the northern road, eight miles north of Derby, they came from muddied bridle-paths to a highway that was deep in trampled slush. "They were nimble in advance, but retreat will have another tale to tell. We shall catch them to-morrow, or the next day after."

And Goldstein agreed; but he did not tell all he knew—how he had learned from the Derby townsfolk that the Prince rode far behind his army, attended only by one horseman. Instead, he spoke of the commission he held, as officer in command of a roving troop of cavalry, and asked if he might be free to harass the retreat.

"We ride lighter than your main body, your Highness, and could pick off stragglers as well as bring news of the route these ragged Pretender's men are taking."

"Yes, ride forward," growled Cumberland, "You've the pick of my scoundrels with you, Goldstein—hard riders and coarse feeders—they'll help you pick off stragglers."

The two men exchanged a glance of understanding. Difference of rank apart, they were brotherly in the instincts that they shared; and his Grace of Cumberland, from his youth up, had had a gift for choosing his friends among those who rode

unencumbered by conscience, or pity, or any sort of tenderness. And, as he had said just now, he found them mostly in the kennels.

"One word," said Cumberland, as the other prepared to ride forward. "There's no quarter to be given. For the country's sake—for the safety of the King—we shall make an example of these rebels."

Goldstein glanced warily at him, to see if he jested and looked for an answering wink. But it pleased the Duke to assume an air which he thought royal.

"An example, you understand?" he repeated. "Tell these gentle devils of yours that they can ride on a free rein. If you scotch a Pretender's man, put your heel on him and kill him outright. Our royal safety—England's safety—depends on it."

Goldstein, as he spurred forward to gather his cavalry together, grinned pleasantly. "Our royal safety—England's safety," he muttered, mimicking the Duke's rough, broken accent. "He's got it pat by heart, though it seems yesterday he crossed from Hanover."

He gathered his men, and rode forward at their head through the rain and the sleety mud that marked the passage of the Highlanders. And when they had gone three miles or so on the northern road, they captured a frightened countryman, who was getting his sheep down from the pastures in anticipation of the coming snow. It was the first blood they had drawn in this campaign, and Goldstein made the most of it. He liked to have a weak thing at his mercy, and he spared the farmer no threat of what would follow if he failed to tell the truth. For his pains, he learned that the Highlanders were marching fast along the northern road, five hours ahead of them. He learned, too, that one who answered to the Prince's description still rode behind his army, and that he was accompanied only by one gentleman on horseback.

They went forward, leaving the countryman half-dazed with fright; and presently Goldstein's men began to murmur at the

hardships of the road. A rough company at best, united only by a common lust of pillage and rapine, they needed a firmer hand on them than one promoted from their own ranks could give.

Goldstein, knowing this, drew them up in line. And first he stormed at them, without avail; for they were harder swearers than himself, and missed that crisp, adventurous flow of tongue which comes to gentlemen-officers at these times. So then, seeing them mutinous and like to get further out of hand the more he stormed, he grinned pleasantly at them. "My orders from the Duke," he said, "are to capture the Pretender, dead or alive, before he gets back to Scotland. There's thirty thousand pounds on his head. He rides alone behind his army, as you heard just now, and we shall share the plunder."

The appeal went home this time, for Goldstein knew his men. They bivouacked that night four miles wide of Macclesfield, in Cheshire, and the next day—the sun showing his face at last through tattered, grey-blue clouds—they came in sight of the Stuart army. They had crossed by a bridle-track which, from a little knoll, gave them a view of the long, straight highway that stretched, a grey, rain-sodden ribbon, between the empty fields. They saw kilted men go by, and horsemen riding at a foot pace; and they heard the pipes that could not anyway be still, as they played that air of "The Flowers of the Forest" which was both dirge and battle-song. And Goldstein, somewhere under the thick hide he carried like a suit of armour, was stirred by the strength and forlornness of it all. He saw great-hearted men go by, shoulders carried square against retreat, and, in some crude, muddled fashion, he understood that they were of fibre stronger than his own. He sat there in saddle, moodily watching the horse and foot go by. There was no chance as yet to pick off stragglers, for the army kept in close order; yet Goldstein waited after the last company had ridden by—they chanced to be the MacDonald clan—as if he looked for some happening on the empty road below.

And presently, while his men began to fidget under this in-

action in the rain, two horsemen came round the bend of the highway. The Prince and Sir Jasper were riding together still, but were talking no longer of the Rising and retreat. Instead, they were laughing at some tale the Prince had lately brought from France; and Sir Jasper was bettering French wit by a story, rough and racy and smelling of the soil, which he had heard at the last meet of hounds in Lancashire before he set out on this sterner ride. For women, when they are heartsick, find ease in rending characters to shreds, especially sister-women's; but men need the honest ease of laughter, whether the jest be broad or subtle.

"Sir Jasper," said the Prince, "you're vastly likeable. When I come to my own, you shall dine with me and set the table in a roar. Meanwhile—a pinch of snuff with you."

Sir Jasper dusted his nostrils, with the spacious air that set well on him. And then, from old habit, he glanced up, in search of the hills that were food and drink to him in time of trouble. He saw no hills worth the name; but, for lack of them, his eyes rested on a mound, wide of his bridle-hand, which from lack of true proportion the country-folk named Big Blue Hill. There was little inspiration to be gathered from the mound; so he looked out with his world's eyes again, and saw that there were horsemen gathered on the rise, and that they wore the enemy's livery.

"Your Highness, we must gallop," he said briefly.

The Prince, following his glance, saw Goldstein plucking his horse into a trot. "I prefer to wait," he said lazily. "It is a skirmish of this sort I hoped for."

"And your Highlanders? We're in the open without a wall to set our backs to. You *dare* not leave your Highlanders."

"True, I dare not." He glanced wistfully at the down-riding men, as if death in the open were easier to him just now than life. "It is retreat once more? Dear God, I must have sinned, to have this sickness put on me!"

"Our horses are fresh. We'll give them Tally-Ho, your Highness."

Through the darkness and the trouble of his soul, through the wish to die here and now and lie in forgetfulness of Derby and retreat, the Prince caught up some tattered remnants of the Stuart courage. It was easy to wait, sword ready, for the oncoming; but it was hard to gallop from an enemy he loathed. Yet from the discipline of that long peril shared with his men, since they came on the forlorn hope from Scotland, the strength that does not fail returned to Prince Charles Edward. He set his mare—Nance Demaine's mare—to the gallop; and Sir Jasper rode keen and hard beside him; and Goldstein found his heavy horse slip and lurch under him, as all his company did while they blundered in pursuit. Goldstein followed headlong. Three of his troopers came to ground in galloping down a greasy slope, and their leader, if he had been a worse horseman, would have shared the same fate. As it was, he kept forward, and at a bend of the road saw, half a mile ahead, the company of MacDonalds who kept the rear of the Stuart army.

"Well, it's not to-day we catch him," he snapped, reining up and facing the ill-tempered men behind him. "We can bide our time."

"Aye, we've been biding a good while," growled a weather-beaten trooper. "Whichever way his back's turned, this cursed Pretender always slips out of reach."

"The money's on his head, you fools!" snapped Goldstein. "You'll mutiny against God or man, but not against thirty thousand pounds, if I know your breed. There's to-morrow; we shall catch him soon or late, while this mood is on him to ride behind his army."

They were sobered by this hint of money. For they were men who plied for hire, and only hire. And that night they encamped on the outskirts of Manchester, where the Prince's army lay, and dreamed they were rich men all. And the next morning they were almost cheerful, this ragged cavalry of Goldstein's, because the day's hunt was up, and because their view of the Rising was narrowed to each man's share of the

blood-money when they took Prince Charles Edward, dead or alive.

Up at Windyhough, in Lancashire, this same red dawn had shone through the open window of Rupert's bedchamber, rousing him from uneasy slumber. He had gone to the casement, and was looking out at the grim majestic moors. Line after line the rugged spurs and knolls strode up from the night mists into the crimson and purple that gained in splendour every moment. Of a truth, it was a man's land; and the thought goaded Rupert into deep and passionate self-pity, as it had always done. Over the hills yonder his father rode beside the Stuart—men going on a manly errand. Perhaps they had fought their big battle already, were hastening to a London eager to receive the conquerors. And he? He was playing at the defence of a house remote from any chance of action. And there was Nance, waiting for him to prove himself, growing cold and contemptuous because each new day found him still Rupert the Dreamer, inept, irritable, a burden to himself and others.

Perhaps, out of the sympathy that had always bound Sir Jasper and his heir together, the like mood had come to both just now, the like need to face a stern and awful sickness of the soul, to win through it, to plant Faith's standard in the wilderness of defeat and hope deferred.

"Nance was right. Nothing will ever again happen at Windyhough, until my father returns from the crowning—and then the work will be done, and no more need of me."

Stubbornly, slowly, he came to a better heart and mind. Undoubtedly this scholar had pluck.

"I will not give in," he said, lifting his head to the ruddy heath as if answering a challenge.

And at that hour the Prince and his father were riding north from Derby—were riding nearer to him than he thought, on a journey whose end no man could foresee.

CHAPTER XI

THE TALE COMES TO WINDYHOUGH

NEARLY a week had gone since Nance came down from her ride on the moor, from the meeting with Will Underwood that had ruined one dream of her life for good and all. Each day that passed was more full of strain for those at Windyhough. They practised musketry together, she and Rupert and old Simon Foster; and the rivalry between them, keen enough, improved their marksmanship. At the week's end Rupert was the best shot of the three; it was his way to be thorough, and to this business of countering Nance's taunt—that she could not trust her men to guard her—he brought the same untiring zeal, the patience not to be dismayed, that had kept his faith secure against disastrous odds.

But as each short day closed in there was the return to the silence of the house at Windyhough, to Lady Royd's wonder if her husband were lying dead in some south country ditch, to the yapping of the toy spaniel that harassed Rupert because, soul and body, he was tired of mimic warfare.

They had come home this afternoon from musket-drill, and Simon had left them in the courtyard. A little, sobbing wind was fluting round the gables, and the red light on the hills foretold, unerringly, that snow would come.

Nance looked up at the black front of Windyhough. The homeless desolation of the land took hold of her. She was cold, and tired of all things; and she sought for some relief, and could find none, save by way of the tongue that is woman's rapier.

"What of your trust, Rupert?" she asked sharply. "A week ago—it seems half a lifetime—you said there would be some swift attack—you said that you had faith. Faith, my

dear—I tell you it is cold and empty as the wind. Your only answer is—why, just your mother's spaniel barking at you from within. Faith should know the master's footstep, Rupert."

He had been sick at heart till now. The answer had not come as soon as he had hoped, and his need was urgent; but the faith in him rose clear and dominant.

"You're a baby, Nance. You talked of half a lifetime. I could wait so long in patience, knowing the Stuart, soon or late, would come to the good crowning."

She glanced at him with impatience, with a certain wistful curiosity. "Does your creed go deep as that, Rupert? Mine does not," she said, with her frank, bewildering honesty.

"My creed?" Rupert's shoulders were squared in earnest now. He stood to his full six feet, and in his eyes was that look of the man who cannot be bought, or bullied, or flattered, from allegiance to the straight road ahead. "It goes deeper, Nance. What else? Faith! You seem to think it means only kneeling in a church, a woman's refuge from the outside storms, a ball to play with, when the time seems slow in passing."

"You will tell me more," said Nance gently.

"I cannot. Go to Sir Jasper, who can use a sword; go to your father, who can fight and hunt and play the man wherever men are gathered. They kneel in church, Nance—and in the open roads they feel their swords the cleaner for it; they carry knighthood with them, so that clowns read it in their faces as they pass."

"Who taught you this?" she asked.

He laughed, with the diffidence and self-contempt that always lay in ambush for him. "I dreamed it, maybe. You always said I was a dreamer, Nance—a fool, you meant, but we're too kind to think it."

So they stood there, in the cold and ruddy gloaming, and were helpless to find speech together. All that lay deep in

Nance, secure beneath each day's indignities, went out to this heir of Windyhough. His view of life was hers; his roots were in the soil, tilled lovingly by far-back fathers, that breeds the strong plants of chivalry. And yet—and yet he was so fitful in his moods, so apart from the needs of every day, so galling to the women who looked, as a matter of course, for their men to go out into the open.

And then, following some odd byway of memory, she recalled how grim and steady and reliant he had been that winter's day—it seemed long since—when he had sent Will Underwood and herself down the moor while he prepared to fight out the quarrel with his younger brother.

"Rupert," she said, seeking for some way of praising him, "you shot well to-day."

"Yes," he growled. "I outshot a woman, Nance—and a man who was crippled in every joint he owned. I take no praise for that. As men count shooting, I'm where I always stood—your patient fool, Nance."

So they stood helpless there, one aching with the love he had—each day of this close companionship making Nance more lovable and more far off—the other stifled by her pity for this heir of Windyhough, who needed so little to touch his manhood into living flame.

And as they stood a horseman came clattering up. There was mud on his horse, so that none could have told whether it were roan or black or chestnut. There was mud on his clothes, and on his hands, and on his lean, strained face. As he reined up sharply, his gift of knowing faces and their records did not fail him.

"You're Sir Jasper's son?" he said. "I'm glad, sir, to meet you out of doors, for it will save me time."

Rupert was aware of some sense of betterment. Dimly, and far off as yet, he saw the answer to his faith take shape and substance. "I remember you, sir," he answered gravely. "You are Mr. Oliphant of Muirhouse, and once you—you praised my shortcomings. You—you helped me, sir, that night

you came to Windyhough. You do not guess the debt I owe you."

Olyphant, sick with hard riding, more sick with the disastrous news that he was bringing to the loyal north, halted for remembrance of that night when he had come to Sir Jasper's and found Lady Royd and a slim, nerve-ridden lad who was vastly like his own dead self, buried long ago under the hills of fine endeavour.

"By your leave, sir," he said, gently as if the pipes were sobbing for dead hopes, "I think you've pluck enough to hear bad news and take it like a soldier. All's lost—at Derby—and the Prince's men are coming north again."

Nance went apart and put weak, foolish hands about her eyes. There could be no resurrection, she fancied, from this death in life that was meant by the retreat from Derby. But Rupert held his head up and looked at Olyphant with steady eyes. The blow was sudden and bewildering; this retreat cut deep into his faith, his certainty that the Prince could not fail to carry London; and his shoulders broadened to the burden, so that he carried it well—almost lightly, as it seemed to Nance.

"My father—he is safe, sir?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, safe; but his temper is like a watch-dog's on the chain—"

"He'll bite deeper when the chance comes." Rupert was smiling gravely through his eagerness. "Mr. Olyphant, I—I dare not ask you what—what my father—and the Prince—and the Highlanders—are feeling."

Olyphant set a rough hand on his arm. "Feeling? The whole route north is one long burial. I've seen battle, I've heard the wounded crying when the night-wind crept into their wounds, but I never met anguish as I met it on the road from Derby. My lad, I cannot speak of it—and the Prince among them all, with a jest on his lips to hearten them, and his face as if he danced a minuet—all but the eyes, the saddened eyes—the eyes, I think, of martyred Charles, when he stepped to the scaffold on a bygone January morning and bade us all *remem-*

ber." Oliphant halted a moment. A fury, resolute and quiet, was on him. "By God, sir, some few of us are not likely to forget!"

And suddenly Nance sobbed aloud, though she had never learned the woman's trick of easy tears. And about Oliphant's face, too, a softness played. It was a moment for these three such as comes seldom to any of us—a moment packed so full with grief and tragedy that they must needs slip off the masks worn at usual times. They three were of the old Faith, the old, unquestioning loyalty. They had no intrigues, of policy or caution, to hide from one another. One of the three had been with the army of retreat, had felt the throb and pity that put a finer edge to the sword he carried; and two of them waited here at Windyhough, sending long thoughts out to help the wayfarers. And now there was an end, it seemed; and in the chilly gloaming their hearts met, caught fire, were friendly in a common grief.

As for Rupert, he felt his soul go free to prison; he was finding now the answer to the unhappy, ceaseless trouble he had undergone since childhood. He had been thrust aside by folk more practical and matter-of-fact; he had feared ridicule; he had heard men name him scholarly, and had retreated, like a snail into its shell, to the dreams of gallantry that were food and drink to him. But through it all he had kept one bridge against all comers—the bridge of his simple, knightly faith; and it is the big deeds such as this—wrought out in silence, so that none guesses them—that train a man for the forlorn hope, the sudden call, the need to step out into the open when there is no one else to face odds ludicrous and overwhelming.

It was Rupert who broke the silence, and his voice was deep and steady. "Mr. Oliphant," he said, not knowing how the words came to him, "this may be for the best."

So Oliphant, who was saddle-sore and human, snapped round on him. "By gad, sir, you are obstinately cheerful! Ride somewhere between here and Derby, and ask the Highlanders

if all is for the best. I tell you I have seen the Prince's face, and faith grows dull. He would be in London now, if he had had his way."

Rupert glanced up to the moors, where the last tattered banners of the sunset fluttered crimson on the hilltops. And in his eyes was the look which any countryman of Lancashire, or any Highlander from Skye, would have known as "seeing far."

"The Prince has not had his way," he said, with queer, unhurried certainty. "You tell us he retreats as other men go to a ball. You say his heart is breaking, sir, and that he still finds jests. I know retreat and waiting—know them by heart—and the going is not smooth. If he can do this—why, he's bigger even than my dreams of him."

Nance understood him now; and Oliphant's ill-temper ceased to trouble him. Here was one, bred of a soldier-stock, who had missed his way along the road of deeds; but to the bone of him he was instinct, not with the ballad-stuff of victory, but with the tedious prose of long, sick marches, of defeat carried with shoulders squared to any onset of adversity.

Oliphant laughed grimly. It was his way when feeling waded so deep that it was like to carry him away. "I've seen many countries, lad—have had my back to the wall a few times, knowing who stood by me and who found excuse to save his skin; but I never in my travels met one so like a man, round and about, find him in rough weather or in smooth, as—as the Prince, God bless him! The ladies up in Edinburgh—your pardon, Miss Demaine, but some of your sex are fools paramount—saw only his love-locks and the rest of it; but we have seen his manhood. There's none like him. And he retreats because my Lord George Murray is mathematical and has captured the Scots prudence of the chiefs; and he's still the great gentleman among us—greater now that he dances, not in Holyrood, but through the miry roads."

Nance glanced up sharply. She was thinking of Will Underwood, who had killed first love for her with a clown's

rough hand. "If there were more men of your breed—and Rupert's——"

"By your leave," broke in Oliphant gruffly, "I think most of us are bred straight. The mongrels make such an uproar that you fancy them a full pack in cry, Miss Demaine. We're not happy, not one of us three; but we carry a faith bigger than our hardships." He turned to Rupert with surprising grace and charm. "My thanks, sir. I was tired before I met you, and now—my weariness is gone."

The door of Windyhough was opened suddenly, and Lady Royd came running out bareheaded, and halted on seeing the horseman and the two on foot in the falling dusk of the courtyard.

"Rupert, I cannot find my little dog!" she cried.

Her elder-born smiled grimly. He was struggling with the need to stand firm against Oliphant's disastrous news; and his mother came to tell him, in her pretty, querulous way, that her little dog was missing.

"Fido is in the house, mother," he answered patiently. "We heard him barking at us when we crossed the courtyard."

"Oh, it is not Fido. It's the little black pug, Rupert. And she's so delicate. An hour of this keen wind, if she is out of doors, might kill the poor, wee doggie."

Oliphant of Muirhouse gave a muttered curse, for, to his finger-tips, he was a man, his instincts primitive when they were touched. Then he laughed gently, for his soul's health, and got from saddle, and stooped to kiss Lady Royd's hand.

"You do not know me, Lady Royd, in this dim light? I'm Oliphant of Muirhouse, and I bring Rising news."

Sir Jasper's wife put a hand to her breast. The movement was quick, and another than Oliphant might easily have missed it in this dim light; but now his task grew harder, for he knew that, apart from pet-dog whimsies, she loved her husband.

"Is he safe, Mr. Oliphant?" she asked, bridging all usual courtesies of greeting.

"Hale and well. I saw him three days since, and he sent

messages to you, knowing I had errands here in Lancashire."

Lady Royd, easy for the moment because her good man did not happen to be lying dead among the ditches of her nightmares, grew almost roguish. "And his heart, sir? Is it sound, too? There are so many pretty women in the south—I know, because I lived there once, before I came to these bleak hills that frighten me."

Oliphant sought for some way of breaking news better left untold. "You to fear rivalry?" he said, in his low, pleasant voice. "Sir Jasper has known you all these years—"

"Precisely. And the years have left their mark. You need not dwell on that, Mr. Oliphant."

"I meant that, to have known you all these years—why, it explains the loverlike and pressing messages he sent by me."

So then Lady Royd was like a girl in her teens. "Tell me what he said."

"No, by your leave!" laughed Oliphant. "He said so much, and my time is not my own just now."

"How—how comforting you are, like Mr. Underwood, who finds always the right word to say."

"I say it with a difference, I hope," snapped Oliphant, too weary to hide old dislikes. "I've known Mr. Underwood longer than I care to remember. He's a man I'd trust to fail me whenever the big hunt was up."

Nance laughed suddenly. The relief was so unexpected and so rousing. "You've the gift of knowing men, Mr. Oliphant."

"There, child!" broke in Lady Royd. "You must come to my years before you talk of understanding men; and even then, if I die in my bed at ninety, I shall never know why we find their daft ways so likeable."

Oliphant, afraid to hurt a woman always, was seeking for some way to break his news. This wife of Sir Jasper's was leal and tender, underneath her follies; and her husband was in retreat—in a retreat dangerous to the safety of his body, but more perilous still to the quick and fiery soul that had led him south with Prince Charles Edward.

"He is in good health," he said slowly—"but the Cause is not."

"There has been a battle?" She was alert, attentive now.

"Yes—a battle of the Council-chamber, and the Prince was outnumbered. The odds were four to one at least."

"I do not understand, sir."

"Nor do I," he went on, in a quiet heat of rage. "We were cavaliers all, dashing straight through England on the forlorn hope. All depended on looking forward. The chiefs chose just that moment to look back along the road of prudence. It is disastrous, pitiful. I dare not think of it."

"So they—are in retreat?"

"That is my message to you. Sir Jasper wishes you to stay here at Windyhough. The march north will go wide of you, through Langton, and you'll be secure here."

Lady Royd stood very still in the wind that at another time would have made her peevish with longing for her warm south country. Her surface tricks, the casual littleness that had disturbed Sir Jasper's peace, were blown aside. She was thinking of her husband, of all this Rising meant to him, of his heartsickness and the hazards that were doubled now.

"I would God, sir, that he had bidden me go out to join him in retreat," she said at last. "I shall be secure here, he thinks? House walls about one, Mr. Oliphant, and food to eat, and wine to drink—are they security? I'm weak and foolish on the sudden—I never understood till now that, where he goes, there is home for me. Shelter? I need none, except his arms about me."

There are times—moments set thick with trouble, when faith and all else seem drowning in the flood—that compel us to struggle free of reticence. Oliphant of Muirhouse was not aware that there was anything singular or unseemly in this spoiled wife's statement of her case. Nance answered to the direct appeal; for her own heart was bruised, and fragrant with the herb named pity. And Rupert, for his part, stood

aside and gazed at his mother across the red, murky twilight, and wondered how it came that one of his dreams was answered after all. In face and voice and tender uprightness of figure, this mother of his was something near the ideal he had woven round her, despite her careless handling of him in the years gone by.

"Ah, there!" said Lady Royd, with a coquettish, gentle laugh. "Nance was talking not long ago of love and knighthood and all that—the baby girl!—and I rapped her over the knuckles with my fan. It's a humdrum world we live in, Mr. Oliphant; and, by that token, you will come in to supper before you carry on the news."

"Not even a mouthful and a glass of wine out here; as for coming in to the meal I crave—why, I dare not do it, by your leave. Sleep is waiting so near to me, to trip me up in the middle of my errand."

She glanced at him, with the instinct that is never far from women to play the temptress. "You look so tired," she said gently. "Surely your news will wait? A warm hearth, Mr. Oliphant, and the meal you need—"

"You said just now that house walls and food and drink were of little consequence—unless you had strong hands about you."

"But you're strong of your hands already. And I am weak."

"Yes," said Oliphant, "passably strong; but it is each man to his trade, my lady. The hands I need—they greet me on the uplands, when my horse and I are so tired out that it is laughable. We get up into the roomy moors—our business lies in that sort of country—and the curlews go crying, crying, as if their sorrow could not rest since a Stuart once was martyred. And we gather up our courage, my horse and I."

"You men," she broke in fretfully—"your thoughts run always up the hills. And you find only the old feuds—a Stuart martyred near a hundred years ago, a king who's earth and

bone-dust by this time, as we shall be one day. It matters so little, Mr. Oliphant, when we come to the end of our lives—to the end of our singing-time."

Oliphant of Muirhouse had learned the hardest of life's lessons—a broad and catholic simplicity; and in the learning he had gained an added edge to the temper that now was lithe as steel. "King Charles is neither earth nor bone-dust," he said pleasantly "He is—alive, my lady, and he knows that we remember."

"Remembrance? What of that?" asked the other lazily. "Just last year's rose-leaves, sir, with the faded scent about them. By your leave, Mr. Oliphant, I thought you more workmanlike and modern."

It was Rupert who broke in. "Remember?" he said stormily. "My father taught me just that word, when he used to come up into the nursery long ago, and play with us. He did not know then how—how like God's fool I was to grow up, and he would tell me tales of Charles the First, how likeable and kingly he was always; how he'd have been glad to take his crown off, and live like a country gentleman, following field-sports all the day, and coming back to the wife and bairns he loved, to spend long evenings with them."

Oliphant of Muirhouse felt pity stir about him. This lad—with the simplicity of one who was seeing far back along the years, scarce knowing that he was speaking his thoughts aloud—was a figure to rouse any thinking man's attention. He was so good a soldier wasted.

"Then father would tell me," went on Rupert, the passion deepening in his voice, "how the King was asked to leave it all; how he could have saved his life, if he had given his Faith in exchange, and how he would not yield. And then—father made it all so plain to me—the King went out from Whitehall, one bitter January day, and the scaffold and the streets were thick with snow, and he went with a grave, happy face, as if he had many friends about him. And he knelt awhile at the scaffold in decent prayer; and then he turned to Bishop Juxon,

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and said, ‘Remember!’ And then—black Cromwell had his way of him, for a little while.”

“My dear, that is past history,” protested Lady Royd, with petulant dislike of sorrow. “Of course he died well, and, to be sure, the snow must have added to his great discomfort; but we live in other times.”

“No!” said Oliphant, sharp as a bugle-call. “We live in the same times, my lady. The way of men’s hearts does not change. I’m tired, and not so young as I was; but your son has marshalled all my courage up.”

So then Rupert stood aside. His chivalry and hero-worship, like his love for Nance, were too delicate as yet, for lack of drill; and he was ashamed that Oliphant of Muirhouse should praise his littleness.

“Mr. Oliphant,” said Lady Royd, with her roguish, faded laugh, “you’re like the rest of my daft men-folk; you are all for remembrance of the days behind——”

“Yes. We take a few steps back, the better to leap forward. That is the strict method of leaping any five-barred gate. There’s been so much surmise about that riddle of ‘Remember,’ and Rupert here has made it plain to me for the first time.”

“‘Out of the mouths of babes,’ ” said Rupert’s mother, with a flippancy that was born of this long idleness at Windyhough, the long anxiety for the safety of her husband, whom, in some muddled way, she loved.

“He is no babe, by your leave. He is nearly a proven man, my lady, and I think God finds no better praise than that for any of us.”

It was all quick in the saying, this talk of folk who heard disaster sing down the bitter wind; but Nance, looking on and seeking some forward grip of life since Will Underwood had fallen by the way, was aware that Rupert had sounded the rally-call when all seemed lost. He was no longer scholarly, unpractical; from the background, with the murky gloaming round him, he was a figure dominant among them. And from-

that background he stepped forward, lightly, with self-assurance, because there was no pageantry about this game of sorrow, but only the quick need to take hold of the every-day routine of hardship.

"It might happen that the retreat came up by way of Windyough?" he asked, straightening the scholarly stoop of his shoulders.

Oliphant looked gravely at him—measured him, with an eye trained to quick judgment of a man—and dared not lie to this son of Sir Jasper's who stayed here among the women, seeking better work. "There's no chance of it," he said gruffly. "They are taking the Langton road. I—I am sorry, Rupert. I wish the thick of it were coming this way. You're in need of exercise, my lad."

And Rupert laughed suddenly. "Mr. Oliphant," he said, with his quiet, disarming humour, "I've had drill enough—a useless sort of drill—and I'm praying these days for assault, and musketry, and siege—anything to save us stay-at-homes from sleep."

Oliphant looked down at the years of his own misshapen boyhood, saw himself a weakling, unproven, hidden by the mists of his own high desires. And he gripped Rupert's hand, said farewell to Lady Royd, and got to saddle.

"Is that all?" asked Rupert, with sharp, disconsolate dismay. "Take me with you, sir. There's a broken-winded horse or two still left in stable."

"I obey orders," snapped Oliphant, with brusque command. "You will do no less, and Sir Jasper was exact in his wish that you should guard the women here."

Rupert was sick at heart, restless to be in the open, lest faith and courage were killed outright by these stifled days at Windyough.

"They're safe, you tell me," he said, yielding to the queer, gusty temper that few suspected in him. "Then I'm free to breathe again. With you, or without you, I shall join the Rising at long last."

Olyphant's heart went out to the mettle of this ill-balanced, stormy lad. For there are many who are keen to follow victory at the gallop; but Olyphant was a man who knew his world—knew it through all its tricks of speech and manner—and he had met few who were eager to ride out along the unsung, unhonoured road where retreat goes slowly through the mire.

"You know what this retreat means?" he asked, in the same sharp tones, as if on parade. "Sullen men, and sullen roads, and northeast winds that cut the heart out of a man's body? Hard-bitten soldiers find it devilish hard to follow, Rupert—and there are the pipes, too, to reckon with. These daft Highland bodies will ever go playing 'The Flowers of the Forest,' till the pity of it goes up and down the wind, like Rachel seeking for strayed children. It is all made up of emptiness and sorrow, I tell you, this road from Derby."

"I should go from worse emptiness and sorrow, here at Windyhough," said Rupert stubbornly. "I fear house-walls, Mr. Olyphant, and the foulest road would seem easy-going——"

Olyphant broke sharply in. This was his own feeling, but it was not the time to give sympathy to Sir Jasper's heir. "You come of a soldier-stock, lad. You want to learn soldiery one day? Well, you'll learn it—I've trust absolute in that—and you begin to-night."

"Then I'll go saddle," said Rupert, eager to try a second fall from horse again.

"No, by your leave!" snapped Olyphant. "You'll play sentry here. Your orders are precise. You guard the house and women, as Sir Jasper bade you."

"Because Sir Jasper knew that no assault would come," said Rupert, with a return of the old heartache. "You leave me as you found me, sir—a toy soldier guarding a house that could only tempt fools to capture it."

Olyphant straightened himself, clicked his heels together. His voice was tired and husky, but precise. "Your officer commands. You obey. What else? Men do not question at

these times." Then, with sudden understanding of the man he had to deal with—with some remembrance of his own rebellious and lonely boyhood—Oliphant stood, rugged and uncompromising, a lean, hard six-foot-two of manhood. "To your post, sentry!" he said sharply.

And Rupert found his heart leap out to the command. Instinctively—because breed shapes us all—he lost the scholarly stoop of shoulders, lost his ill-temper and loneliness. He saluted stiffly. And Oliphant got to horse, and was riding, slowly forward, when Lady Royd ran to his saddle.

"I have the most dismaying curiosity, Mr. Oliphant," she said, lifting the pretty, faded face that would always keep its charm. "It is the woman's curse, they tell us. What did King Charles mean when he said 'Remember'? We've been guessing at the riddle for a hundred years or so, and it still baffles us."

Oliphant glanced up at the roomy hills, at the red snow-gloaming that was dying slowly round their crests. "What did he mean—that day he went to death? No words could tell you. It was something high, and strong, and lasting, like your moors up there."

"Oh, no; that could not be. He was so full of courtesy, so gentle—so like the warm south-country I left long ago. King Charles, sir, was never like these hills that frighten me."

Oliphant looked down at her, with some pity and a great chivalry. "You hold the woman's view of him," he said, with the simplicity inborn in him. "As a man sees him, Lady Royd, he did what few among us could. His wife and bairns were pulling him back from the scaffold—and he loved them; his ease, his love of life, his fear of the unknown—all were against him. He could have saved the most comely head in England, and would not, because his faith was stubborn. By your leave, I bow my head when the thought of Martyred Charles goes by me."

Lady Royd looked at this man, so hard of body, so tired and resolute. "I thought you practical, Mr. Oliphant."

"None more so. I'm a Scotsman," he put in, with a laugh that struck no discordant note. "If it had not been for King Charles, I should not be here—riding evil roads as if I danced a pleasant measure."

"You're beyond me, sir; but then, men always were. They never seem to rest; and when the wind blows keenest, they run out into it, as if it were warmer than the fireside."

"And there the secret's out. That was King Charles's meaning when he bade all Christian royalists remember. It was your son who explained it all to me just now."

"Ah, Rupert! The poor boy dreams too much. You're indulgent, Mr. Oliphant."

They fell silent, as people do when feeling throbs and stirs about them like thunder that is brewing up, but will not break. And Oliphant, out of this thunder-weather that he knew by heart, found sudden intuition. Sir Jasper's wife had not followed him to learn what the last message meant of a King dead these hundred years; she had sought cover, as women do when they are harassed, had waited till she found courage to ask the question that was nearest to her heart.

"You're thinking of your husband, Lady Royd?" he said, with blunt assurance. "I shall see him soon, if all goes well, and I shall tell him—what?"

Women undoubtedly are as Heaven made them, a mystery past man's understanding. Lady Royd, deep in her trouble, chose this moment to remember how Sir Jasper had wooed her as a girl—chose to grow younger on the sudden, to carry that air of buoyancy and happiness which makes the tired world welcome all daft lovers. "You've read my heart, sir, in some odd way. My husband—I cannot tell you what he means to me. I was not bred to soldiery. I—I hated the sword he carried out with him, because sharp steel has always been a nightmare to me, and he was cruel when he bade me buckle it on for him."

"As God sees us, he was kind," broke in Oliphant, moved by extreme pity for this spoiled wife who had fallen on evil

days. "He loves you. The summons came. It was for your sake—yours, do you not understand?—that he kept faith with the Prince."

"For my sake—he could have stayed at home. I—I needed him. I told him so."

Olyphant was so tired that even compassion could not soften the rough edge of his temper. "And if he'd stayed? You would have liked your tame cat about the house? You'd have fussed over him and petted him—but you'd never in this life have found the medicine to cure his shame."

"Oh, there!" said the other fretfully. "You worship honour. It is always honour with you men who need excuse for riding far away from home."

"Honour?" snapped Olyphant, eager again for the relief of miry roads and saddle-soreness. "It is the Prince's watchword. His heart is broken—or near to it—and honour is the one light left him. It keeps him gay, my lady, through fouler trouble than you or I have strength to face. And so—good-night, I think."

"No, no! We must not part like this. I—I am so foolish, Mr. Olyphant—and you are angry—"

"Your pardon," he said, with quick and gay compunction. "It was my temper—my accursed temper. I'm too tired just now to keep a tight rein on the jade."

"Ah, there! You were always generous. It is a quality that keeps men lean, I notice." She looked him up and down, again with the hint of coquetry that became her well. "It is a gallant sort of leanness, after all. For myself, I'm growing—a little plump, shall we say?"

"More graceful in the outline than myself. I was always a figure to scare corbie-crows away with."

Sir Jasper's wife, from the depth of her own trouble, knew how weary and in need of solitude he was. She wondered that he could keep up this game of ball—nice coquetry and chiselled answer—when all the sky was red about the moor

up yonder, and all the hazard of retreat was singing at their ears.

" You will see my husband soon?" she said softly. " I—I have a message for him——"

" My trade lies that way. You can trust me with it."

" You may tell him that I—I miss him, sir; and if he seems to miss me, too—why, go so far as to say that my heart is aching."

Olyphant, moved by a gust of feeling, stooped to her hand. " I never had a wife, myself. God was not kind that way. I'll take your message, and Sir Jasper will forget the miry roads, I think."

He rode out, a trim, square-shouldered figure, carrying hardship as a man should. And Lady Royd, because he reminded her of the husband whose memory was very fragrant now, went down to the gate, and watched horse and rider merge into the gloaming. And, long after they were out of sight, she stood and listened to the tip-tap of hoofs, faint and ever fainter, down and up the track that was taking Olyphant along his road of every-day, hard business.

Behind her, Rupert and Nance Demaine were standing, facing each other with mute dismay. Without knowing that they were eavesdroppers, they had heard Lady Royd's voice, with its half-pleasant note of querulousness, and the rider's low, tired answers to her questions. And they had not heeded overmuch—for each was busy with the ill news brought from Derby—until, merciless, exact, they heard across the courtyard Olyphant's rough, " And if he'd stayed? You would have liked your tame cat about the house? "

Nance had looked sharply up at Rupert, had seen his soldierly, straight air desert him, and she understood.

" My dear," she said, broken up by sharp sympathy, " he—he did not mean that you——"

" So you, too, fit the fool's cap on? I'm going indoors, Nance—to my post, to find Simon Foster."

He was hard hit; and the strength of the fathers stiffened

his courage, now in the hour of shame, so that he was almost gay. And Nance could make nothing of this mood of his, because she was born a woman, and he a man.

"You always brought your troubles to me, Rupert," she pleaded, laying a hand on his sleeve.

"Yes, till they grew too big for you. And now—why, Nance, I think I'll shoulder them myself."

He seemed to stand far away, not needing her. It seemed, rather, in this moment of despair, that she went in need of him. Will Underwood had deserted her, had trodden her first love underfoot; she was bruised and tired; and the Rising news was wintry as her loneliness.

Rupert, his voice firm again, turned at the porch. "Good-night, Nance," he said, with the gaiety that hurt her. "You may sleep well—the tame cat guards the house, my dear."

There was bitterness and heartache about this house of Windyhough. The wind would not be still, and men's sorrows would not rest. And the stark moor above lay naked to the wintry moon, and shivered underneath her coverlet of sleet.

Nance, by and by, followed Rupert indoors, and went into the parlour, with its scent of last year's rose-leaves, its pretty, useless ornaments, its air of stifled luxury, warring with the ruddy gloaming light that strode down from the moors and peeped through every window, as if to spy out the shams within doors.

She sat down to the spinet, and touched a mellow, tender chord or two; and then, because needs must, she found relief in song. Her singing voice was like herself, dainty, well-found, full of deep cadences where tenderness and laughter lurked. It was no voice to take the town by storm, but one to hearten men, when they came in from the open, against the next day's warfare. And she sang Stuart songs, with a little lilt of sorrow in them, because of Oliphant's news from Derby and because of Will Underwood's sadder retreat from honour, and hoped somehow that Rupert would hear her

and come to her, because she needed him. He was so fond of ballads—those, most of all, that had the Stuart constancy about them—and Nance was sure that she could entice him down, could sing some little of his evil mood away from him.

Instead, as she halted with her fingers on the keys, she heard Rupert tramping overhead, and Simon Foster's heavy footfall, as they went their round of what, in irony and bitterness, they named the defences.

"This loophole covers the main door, Simon," she heard Rupert say, with his tired laugh. "In case of a direct attack from the front, I station myself here with six muskets, aim sure and quickly, picking my man carefully each time, and disorder them by making them think we are in force."

"That's so, master," growled Simon. "And while you're busy that way, I make round to the left wing, and get a few shots in from there across the courtyard. "Oh, dangment!" he broke off. "We have it all by heart, and there's only one thing wanting—the attack itself. I'm nigh wearied o' this bairn's play, I own. It puts me i' mind, it does, of Huntercomb Fair, last October as ever was."

"What happened there?" asked Rupert, as if the other's slow, unhurried humour were a welcome respite.

"Well, they were playing a terrible fine piece where soldiers kept coming in, and crossing th' stage, till you counted 'em by scores. But, after I'd seen what was to be seen, I went out; and I happened to go round by the back o' the booth, and I saw how it was done. There were just five soldiers, master—one was Thomas Scatterty's lad, I noticed, who's said to run away from a sheep if it bleats at him—and these durned five, why, they went in at one end o' the booth, and marched across th' stage, and out a t'other end. Then they ran round at th' back, and in again; and so it went on, like, till th' sweat fair dripped from them, what with hurrying in and out."

Nance, listening idly, could hear that low, recurrent laugh of Rupert's—the laugh that was tired, and hid many troubles.

"Yes, Simon, yes," he said, with high disdain of himself and circumstance, "it is all very like Huntercomb Fair; but at Huntercomb they had the jostling crowd, the lights, the screech of the fiddles. Here at Windyhough we have—just silence—a silence so thick and damnable, Simon, that I'm praying for a gale, and fallen chimney-stacks, and the wind piping through the broken windows."

"Aye, you were ever a dreamer. The dreamers are all for speed, and earthquakes, and sudden happenings. Life as it's lived, master, doesn't often gallop. It creeps along, like, same as ye and me are doing, and keeps itself alive for fear of starving, and gets up, some durned way or another, for th' next day's work. Well, have we done, like, or must we finish this lad's game?"

And then Nance heard a sharper note in Rupert's voice. She had heard it once before, that day he fought with his brother on the moor because he thought her honour was in question. "We finish, Simon. What else?"

"Now you're at your faith again, master. I can hear it singing like a throstle. Well, I'm a plain man myself, asking plain proof. Just as man to man—and want o' respect apart—has your pretty, gentleman's faith done much for you?"

"Yes," said Rupert, unexpectedly. "It has given me pluck to see this business through. A houseful of women and cripples—my father taking all the burden on his shoulders while I skulk at home—dear God! I'd be in a coward's grave by now, Simon, if faith had not stood by me."

"Then there's summat in it, after all?"

"It is powder in the musket," said Rupert, as if there could be no further argument. "No more, no less. But you and I, Simon, have to find the spark that fires it."

Nance heard them pass overhead, heard the sound of Simon's heavy boots die along the corridor. And she turned again to the spinet, and her fingers moved up and down the keys, their colour mellowed by long service, and played ran-

dom melodies that were in keeping with her thoughts—not Stuart airs, because these asked always sacrifice, and the big heart, and the royal laugh that comes when things go wrong in this world.

Nance was too tired to-night for the adventurous road. To-morrow she would be herself again, eager, resolute, prepared for the day's journey. But just now she needed the sleep, that stood far away from her; needed some charitable, firm voice to tell her she was foolish and unstrung; needed Rupert, as she had not guessed that she could lack any man. And Rupert had tramped overhead, concerned with make-believe defences.

"Oh, he does not care!" she said, believing that she hated him. "Simon Foster, crippled in both legs, and musty loopholes, and powder that he'll never use—they're more to him than all this heartbreak gathering over Windyough."

Into the scented room, with its candles shining from their silver sconces, Lady Royd came, tremulous and white of face, from watching Oliphant of Muirhouse ride out.

"Nance, my dear, I—I am tired," she said.

"I think we all are," Nance answered, rising from the spinet with a deference that had no heart in it.

"Oh, you're querulous, and so am I," said the other, with a shrewd glance at the girl's face. "If our men could see us now—our men who fight for us—they would be astonished, Nance. We're so little like their dreams of us. You in a bad temper, and I ready to cry if a mouse threatened me, and our men, God bless them! thinking only of old England, and our beautiful bright eyes, Nance—your eyes and mine—just red, my dear, if you'll forgive me, with the tears men think our luxury."

Nance, made up of hill-rides, and free winds, and charity, looked quietly at Lady Royd, read some fellowship in the pretty, faded face. "I have—a few griefs of my own," she said, with the sudden penitence that was always like April's sunshine after rain. "I forgot that you had yours."

The older woman grasped Nance's hand, and held it, and looked into the young, faithful eyes. She needed youth just now; for she felt that she was growing old.

"Nance, he is out with the Rising. And they've retreated. And—and, girl, when you come to my age, and have a husband and a son who will go fighting for high causes—oh, you'll know, Nance, how one's heart aches till it goes near to breaking."

"You will tell me," said Nance, laying a gentle hand on the other's arm.

And Lady Royd looked gravely at her for a moment, through the tears that lay thick about the babyish, blue eyes. And then she laughed—with gallantry and tiredness, as Rupert had laughed not long ago when he listened to Simon Foster's tale of Huntercomb Fair.

"My dear, I should be glad to tell you—if I could. How should I find words? I've loved him for more than six-and-twenty years, Nance, and guessed as much long since, but was never sure of it till he rode out. And now—he's in the thick of danger, and I cannot go to him."

"He is happy," said Nance, with stormy wish to help this woman, stormy grasp of the courage taught her by the hills. "Our men are bred that way; they are happiest when they're like to lose their necks—in the hunting-field, or on Tower Hill, or wherever the good God wills. I think Sir Jasper is happier than you or I."

"That is true." Lady Royd made the most of her slender height. She was learning the way of royalty at last, after Sir Jasper had tried patiently to teach it to her all these years. "And I? My heart is breaking, Nance; but I'll carry my wounds as—as he would carry his. They're in retreat, I tell you, and—and we shall not meet again, I think—I, and the husband whom I love."

"Oh, you will meet—and—and, if not—" said Nance, with that nice handling of high faith and common sense which made her charm so human and so likeable—"you love him,

and his one thought is for you; and Rupert would tell you that death is so little, after all."

"I suppose it is," said Lady Royd, with a petulant shrug of the shoulders; "but it is tiresome of you, Nance, to remind one of the end of all things pleasant. Oh, by your leave, my dear, no talk of faith! I've had no other food to live on these last months, and I need a change of diet, girl, need—just my man's arms about me, and his voice bidding me take heart again. I tell you, we're not strong, we women, without our men to help us."

Nance remembered her liking for Will Underwood, the shameful end of it; remembered Rupert, tramping overhead not long ago with Simon Foster and disdaining all the songs that should have brought him to her side. And her grasp of life grew firmer on the sudden. It was true, as spoiled, wayward Lady Royd had said, that women, since the world's beginning, need the strong arms of their men about them.

Simon Foster, meanwhile, had done his round of the house, had said good-night to Rupert; and afterwards he had gone down to the kitchens, his step like a lover's. He did not find Martha there, and answered the sly banter of the women-servants by saying that he needed to cross to the mistals, to see how the roan cow, that was sick of milk-fever, was faring.

"You'll find Martha there," said a pert scullery-maid; "and I'm sorry for the roan cow, Simon."

"And why?" asked Simon, tired long since of all women except one.

"Well, you alone—or Martha alone—you're kindly with all ailments. But, put the two o' you together—within kissing distance—and the roan cow must learn to bellow if she needs be heard."

Simon Foster turned about. He was the lone man fighting for his liberty. "I'm fair blanketed with women these days," he growled. "Their lile, daft ways go meeting a plain man at every turning of the stairs."

"One maid's lile, daft ways have sent your wits astray, Simon," purred his adversary.

Simon straightened his bent shoulders. The young light was in his eyes again. He looked comely; for a man at bay shows always the qualities that are hidden by sleek prosperity. "Well, yes," he said; "but Martha happens to be worth twenty of you silly kitchen wenches—that's why I chose her."

The pert maid took up a clout from the table, aimed it at Simon, and missed him by three feet or so.

"The master could teach you a lesson," he chuckled. "We've been up the pastures these days, shooting. And master has got a bee in his bonnet, like, about this gunshot business. 'Simon,' he says to me, no further back than yesterday, 'there's nothing matters, except to see straight and to aim straight. We may be needed by and by.'"

It was so that Simon got away, and went out a conqueror for his little moment, because he had silenced the strife of women's tongues. Across the darkness of the mistal-yard a lanthorn came glimmering fitfully, as Martha crossed from the byres to the house.

"Well, Martha?" said Foster, striding into the flickering belt of light.

"Well, Simon?" she answered, without surprise. She was no lass in her teens, to think that grown men welcome fright; and so she did not scream, sudden as his intrusion was.

"I've been thinking, lass."

"And so have I. The roan cow is easier, thanks to me; and all the while I put the salt-bags on, and cosseted her, and teased her back to health, I thought a deal, Simon."

"What, of me?" he asked, with a sprightly air.

An owl, far down the sloping fields, sounded her call as she swooped to kill rats and field-mice for her larder. And Martha, though the light from her lanthorn was dim enough to hide it, could not forego a touch of coquetry.

"Of you?" she laughed, setting a finger to her dimpled

cheek. "Hark to yond owl. You're all alike, you hunting-folk; you've the masterful, sharp voice with you."

"Seems somebody has got to be masterful these days. I've driven sheep to market, and I've tried to drive pigs, and I've handled skew-tempered horses; but for sheer, daft contrariness, give me a houseful o' women, with few men to guide 'em."

"You're not liking women these days?" said Martha tartly.

"Aye, by ones or twos. It's when they swarm about a house, like a hive o' bees, that lone men get feared, like, o' your indoor fooleries. Anyway, Martha, I wish I were out with Sir Jasper—just as Master Rupert does."

"And you talked of—of liking me—not so very long since."

"Aye, and meant it; but how's a man to find speech wi' the one lass he wants, when yard and kitchen's filled wi' women he's never a need for?"

"Well, that's how I feel," said Martha, unexpectedly. "Women are made that way, Simon; they're silly when they herd too thick together."

"There's like to be a change before so very long," put in the other hurriedly, as if he talked of the next day's ride to market. "It seems this bonnie Prince they make such a crack of has turned back from Derby. And we're near the line they'll take, Martha; and, please God, there's a chance the fight will come Windyhough way."

"And you'll be killed, Simon?" she said, coming so close to him that the horn-top of her lantern scorched his hand.

"Maybe not. There's two sides go to a killing, same as to a bargain. It might happen, like, that t'other lad went down."

"But what of me, Simon, if—if it chanced otherwise?"

"I'm not meaning to let it chance otherwise, my lass. I've you to think of these days." And then he drew apart, after the fashion of men when war is in the air. "Master

Rupert shapes gradely," he said. "I always said he had the makings of a soldier in him."

"Oh, he's a scholar," said Martha. "I like him well enough—we all do—but he wears his head i' the clouds, Simon."

"Tuts! He's never had his chance. You're all for young Master Maurice; he's stronger and more showy, as second bairns are apt to be; but gi'e me the young master's settled pluck."

"Gi'e me," said Martha, with bewildering tenderness, "the end of all this Rising trouble, and us two in a farm together, wi' a churn to work at, and an ingle-nook to sit by when the day's work is over wi'. I'd not sell that farm I've dreamed of, Simon, for all your bonnie Prince's love-locks."

"Well, as for love-locks," said the other, his thoughts still busier with war than peace, "he has none so many left these days. He's a plain man, riding troubled roads; and he carries himself like a man, they say, or near thereby."

Martha lifted her lanthorn suddenly to his face. "Aye, you carry the 'far' look," she said jealously. "Cattle i' the byre, the quiet lowing o' them, and a hearth-place warm and ready for ye—they're windle-straws to ye just now, my lad."

And Simon laughed. "I'd like one straight-up fight, I own, before I settle down. It's i' the blood, ye see. I carried a pike i' the last Rising, and killed one here and there, and took my wounds. A man no way forgets, Martha, the young, pleasant days. And there's danger near the house, if all Mr. Oliphant said be true."

"Well, gang in and meet it, then," snapped Martha, "if your stiffened joints will let you."

She was sore with jealousy, though Simon's battle-hunger was her only rival, and struck at random, cruelly, as women do at these times, because God made them so. And Simon, because men are made so, winced, and recovered, and said never a word as he crossed to the kitchen door.

"Simon!" she called, with late-found penitence.

He did not turn his head, but strode indoors, through the running banter that met him by the way, and went upstairs to find Rupert standing by the loophole that overlooked the main doorway.

"At your post, master?" he said dryly.

Rupert turned sharply. "You disturbed a dream of mine," he said, in his well-bred, scholarly voice. "I was fancying men were out in the moonlit courtyard, that I aimed straight, Simon, and shot a few of those black rats from Hanover."

Simon chuckled soberly. He liked to hear his favourite lapse from the orderly speech that was his usual habit.

"They'll come, sure enough," he said gruffly. "We've waited over-long, you and me, to miss some chance o' frolic at the last."

Rupert, with his large, royal air, disdaining always the lean, scholarly form he carried, laughed gently. "My faith is weak to-night, Simon. So little happens, and God knows I've prayed for open battle."

"Well, bide," said Simon. "I've my own fancy, too, though I was never what you might call a prayerful man, that the battle's coming up this way. My old wounds are plaguing me, master, like to burn me up; and you may say it's th' change i' the weather, if it pleases ye, but I think different."

Rupert welcomed the other's guarded prophecy, for to-night he needed hope. And he fell again to looking through the loophole on to the empty, moonlit courtyard; and suddenly, from the far side of the house, he heard Nance's voice again, as she tried to sing a little of Lady Royd's heartsickness away.

The voice, so low and strong and charitable, the thought of her face, her brown, waving hair, her candid eyes, struck Rupert with intolerable pain and sense of loss. He recalled the years when he should have been up and doing, winning his spurs like other men. His shy, half-ironic, half-scholarly aloofness from the life of every day showed as a thing contemptible. He magnified his shortcomings, accused himself

of cowardice, not physical cowardice, but moral. All these years, while his love for Nance was growing, he should have been conquering the weakness that separated him from his fellows, should have been climbing the steep path of hardship, training himself to be strong as his passion for Nance Demaine.

To-night, as he thought of these things, he understood, to the last depth, this love that possessed him utterly. It was a soldier's love, a strong man's. It was content to forego, content to watch and guard and work, so long as Nance was happy, though to himself it brought tumult and unrest enough. The keen, man's longing to claim her for his own, to take her out of reach of such as Will Underwood, had given him many an evil day and night; but through it all, unconquerable, had come that strong, chivalrous desire to keep her feet from the puddles and the mire of life, to serve her hand and foot, and afterwards, since he was needful to her in no other way, to stand by and watch her happiness from some shadowed corner.

There was all his life's training, all the tenor of his long, boyhood's thoughts, in this fine regard he brought Squire Demaine's daughter. There was, too, the Stuart training that had deepened the old Royd instincts given him at birth. It was, in part, the devotion he would have given a queen if he had been her cavalier; and, through it all, there went that silver skein of haplessness and abnegation bravely borne which is in the woof and weft of all things Stuart. He knew the unalterable strength and beauty of his love; and, with a sudden overmastering shame, he saw himself—himself, unfit to join the Rising, useless and a stay-at-home, beside this other picture of his high, chivalrous regard for Nance. He laughed bitterly. It was grotesque, surely, that so fine a passion should be in charge of such a weakling.

And then, from the midst of his humiliation and pain, he plucked courage and new hope. It was his way, as it had been his father's. If this dream of his came true—if the retreat

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swept up this way, as Simon hoped, and gave work into his hands—he would give Nance deeds at last.

"The night is not so empty as it was, Simon," he said, turning sharply. "We'll patrol the house."

CHAPTER XII

THE GALLOP

THE retreat had moved up through Staffordshire and Cheshire, always evading the pursuit that followed it so closely from many separate quarters. The Highlanders had ever their hearts turned backward to the London road—the road of battle; but old habit made their feet move briskly along the route mapped out for them. They set the pace for the Lowland foot, less used to the swinging stride that was half a run; and for this reason the Prince's army went northward at a speed incredible to Marshal Wade, the Duke of Cumberland, and other heavy-minded generals who were eager in pursuit.

There was irony in the whole sad business. A few cautious leaders of the clans apart, few men were anxious to succeed in this retreat. They would have welcomed any hindrance by the way that allowed one or more of the pursuing armies to come up with them. Food was often lacking, because defeated folk are apt to find less wayside hospitality than conquerors; their feet were sore from long contact with the wet roads, that both chafed and softened them; yet their worst hardship was the need for battle that found no food to thrive on. Behind them Cumberland was cursing his luck because he could not catch them up; yet, had he known it, he was the gainer by his failure. If he and his mixed company of hirelings had met the Prince's men just now, they would have been ridden through and through, as Colonel Gardiner's men had been at Prestonpans in the first battle of the Rising. For the Highlander is sad and gusty as the mist-topped hills that cradled him; but when the mood is on him, when all seems lost, and he is gay because the odds are ludi-

crously against him, he goes bare-sark to the fight and accomplishes what more stolid men name miracles.

They went north—the men who wished to overtake and the men who yearned to be overtaken. And the luck was all with Marshal Wade and Cumberland; for the Prince's army constantly evaded them. There are times, maybe, when God proves His gentlemen by the road of sick retreat, by denial of the fight they seek. But few win through this sort of hazard.

Sir Jasper was leading his own little troop of gentry, yeomen, and farmer-folk when they crossed the Cheshire border and made up into Lancashire, and neared the bluff heights that were his homeland. The wind was shrewd still from the northeast, and sleet was driving from the grey-black mist that swept the hilltops, yet Sir Jasper, by the look of the shrouded hills, by the smell of the wind in his teeth, knew that he was home again in Lancashire. Love of women is a hazardous and restless enterprise, and a man's leal liking for his friend is apt to be upset by jealousies; but love of the hills that cannot lie, love of the feel and scents and sounds of the country that he loves never desert the native-born. They are there, like a trusty dog, running eagerly before him when he is home again, biding on the threshold with a welcome if he chances to be absent.

Until now Sir Jasper had been much with his men, had lightened their spirits as best he could through this evil march toward reinforcements in which few believed. But now some wildness seemed to come to him from the windy moors that had bred him. He was tired of leading men against the emptiness that met them day by day, and remembered the lonely figure of his Prince, who was still obstinate, despite Captain Goldstein's late attack, in riding often behind the rear-guard of his army. More than once, since leaving Derby, Sir Jasper had ridden back along the route, had found the Prince separated by a few hundred yards from the last of the stragglers, and had tarried with him, partly to be near if the

danger which he seemed to court recurred, and partly because the close and friendly intimacy that was growing between them had a charm that lightened the trouble of the road.

To-day, as they came nearer still to his own country—the march was planned to reach Langton by nightfall—Sir Jasper yielded to his restless mood. He turned to Maurice, who was riding at his bridle hand.

"Take our men forward, boy," he said. "I'll join you by and by."

Maurice showed few traces of the high spirits that had set him galloping once after Nance Demaine in a race for the glove she was to forfeit if he caught her up, of the fiery eagerness with which he had fought his brother Rupert on the moor. He could not understand the reason of his turn about from Derby. Since childhood he had been used to find action ready to his hand, used to the open life of the fields, in saddle or with a gun under his arm; and he was baffled by this slow, rain-sodden tramp over roads that led only to the next night's bivouac. The constant rains, moreover, had increased his saddle-soreness and had given him a maddening toothache; and it is hard, at two-and-twenty, to bear any pain of body, apart from that associated with heroic wounds.

"I will take them forward, sir," he answered moodily, "though I've no gift of heartening them, as you have. If you promised me all Lancashire, I could not crack a jest with them just now."

Sir Jasper turned his head sharply, glanced at Maurice with the shrewd, steady eyes of middle age. "You were not out in the '15 Rising, lad," he snapped. "I was through it—and thirty years have gone under the bridge since then—and I've learned to wait. Waiting trains a man, I tell you."

"Waiting has given me the most devilish toothache, sir."

And his father laughed. So had he felt himself when, long ago, an untried boy, he had shared the troubles of a disastrous Rising. "There's a worse malady," he said dryly.

"None that I can think of at this moment."

"Try heartache, Maurice—the Prince can tell you what that means. And I can tell you, maybe. It comes to older men, like gout. For the rest, you take your orders. You're in command of our Lancashire lads till I return."

Maurice answered, not the words but the quiet hardihood of this father who had licked him into some semblance of a man. "I'm in charge, sir—till you return," he answered gravely.

Sir Jasper drew apart, to the edge of the rising, heathery bank that flanked the road; and he watched the horsemen and the foot go by. Highlanders passed him with bowed shoulders, moving like dullards who have forgotten hope; for they had the temperament which does high deeds to set the world's songs afame, or which refuses hope of any sort. The Lowlanders wore a grim and silent air, carrying disillusion with dourness and reserve. But grief was manifest in every face.

Whether he died soon or late, Sir Jasper would not forget this long pageant of despair that went by him along the sodden northward tracks. Five thousand men, with souls keen and eager, had been ready for the fight; and they were marching north unsatisfied. Sir Jasper by habit, was careful of his tongue; but now he cursed Lord George Murray with quiet and resolute exactness. The wind was cold, and the sleet nipped his face; but the chilliest thing that he had met in life was this surrender of leal folk to such a man as Murray. It was unbelievable, and he was compelled to take a new, firmer grip of the faith which had heartened him through lesser storms.

The last of the army passed, and Sir Jasper sighed sharply as he reined his horse toward the south and looked for the one figure—the figure prominent among them all—that had been missing. And presently a solitary horseman came round the bend of the highway. He carried his shoulders square, his head erect; yet, under his royal disdain of circumstances, there was the Stuart sadness plainly marked.

The Prince glanced up as he saw the other ride to meet him. "Ah! you, Sir Jasper," he said quietly. "You were ever of my mind—to be where our soldiers need us most."

"You give me too much praise," began Sir Jasper, and could get no farther.

The Prince and he were alone on this barren road—alone in the world, it seemed, comrades in the bitter sleet-time of adversity—and he was shaken by a sudden, desperate pity, by a loyalty toward this royal fugitive and a gladness that he was privileged to share a moment of defeat with him. He knew, to a heart-beat, what the other was suffering. They had the like aims, the like hardihood; and intuition taught them to be brothers, the older man and the young, here on the northern road.

"Your Highness, I have—I have no words," he said at last.

"Ah, there!" said the Prince, with a gentleness that was cousin to abiding sorrow. "I know what you would say. Best leave it unsaid."

They jogged up the road together in silence, each busy with thoughts that were the same.

"It is incredible," growled Sir Jasper presently, as if the words escaped him unawares.

The Prince shrugged his shoulders, with a touch of the French habit that still clung to him. "But so is life, my friend—each day of it the most astounding muddle of surprises. They said I could not land in Scotland and bring an ill-trained army through the heart of England. I did it, by grace of God. And then we said that the road from Derby to the throne was open to us—and so it was, but for one obstacle we had forgotten."

"Your Highness," said the other, with sharp remembrance of the past, "I could have removed that obstacle—and would not. I did not serve you well."

"What! removed the Highlanders' gospel that they serve

their own chieftain first and after that their king? With faith you might do it, sir—the faith that removes mountains; but otherwise—”

“ I had my lord Murray’s life at command—and—I did not take it.”

The Prince’s face was hard when he heard the way of that duel in the wood. He was thinking not at all of pity and chivalrous scruples, but of the men entrusted to his care who had been routed by Murray’s prudent obstinacy. “ God forgive you, sir! ” he said gravely. “ I wish you had not told me this. With Murray laid aside I should have had my way at Derby.”

Sir Jasper peeped now behind the veil of that disastrous Council, guessed how disordered the party of retreat would have been without their leader. And he glanced at the Prince’s face—he who loved and had followed him into the unknown for sake of warm, unquestioning loyalty—and read only condemnation there. And because he was wearier than he knew, it seemed that all his strength and steadfastness were leaving him. Until now the cold and hardship had touched his body, but not the soul of him—the soul that passed sorrows through the mills of faith, and made forward battle-songs of them.

His comrade in adversity glanced round on him suddenly, saw how hardly he was taking the rebuke. And the Prince, as his habit was, forgot the bitter might-have-beens and rallied to the help of one in need.

“ Sir Jasper,” he said, with a grace boyish in its candour, “ we’re bred of the same stuff, you and I. We are hot and keen, and we hate—as far as the gallows, but not as far as the rope. It seems idle that one Stuart should chide another of the breed.”

“ I served you ill,” said the other. “ He was known already as the weak link of the chain—and I did not snap it.”

“ It would have lain on your conscience. You could not do it, that was all.”

"You are kind," said Sir Jasper slowly—"but you struck deep just now. I've feared many things in my time, but never once that I should fail the Stuart."

The Prince fumbled in the tail pocket of his riding-coat, took out a battered pipe, filled and lit it—with some difficulty, for the tinder in his box was none too dry. "I've found three good things in my travels," he said, blowing clouds of smoke about him—"a dog, a pipeful of tobacco, and friends like yourself, Sir Jasper; they seldom fail a man. I was hasty just now, for I was thinking of—of my Highlanders, God help them!"

And again a silence fell between them as they rode up and down the winding road that lay now a short six miles from Langton. It was all odd and unexpected to Sir Jasper, this ride at a foot pace through the lonely, hill-girt lands that were his homeland. He was with the yellow-haired laddie who had painted dreams for him on the broad canvas of endeavour. And the dreams had had their end at Derby; and they were here, beaten men who looked each other in the face and were content to be together.

"You are oddly staunch, sir," said the Prince by and by. "It is good to meet a man in all this wilderness of sleet and cold arithmetic."

"I was bred to be staunch, your Highness. My father taught me the way of it—and his father in the days before. There's no credit to the tree because its roots happen to be planted deep."

The other smiled at Sir Jasper's childlike statement of his case, as if it were a truth plain to all men. "You've sons to follow you, I trust? They'll be the better for training of that sort."

The wind blew in bitter earnest now against Sir Jasper's face. All his love for Rupert, all his hidden shame that the heir could not ride out with him, were so many weights added suddenly to the burden he was carrying already. "I have one son with me in the Rising," he said gravely. "I pre-

sented him to your Highness—at Langton, I think, when we rode south."

"Why, yes." The Prince seldom forgot a man's record or his face. "A ruddy, clean-built youngster, who went pale at sight of me, as if—as if, comrade, I were made of less common clay than he. I remember him. He tried to stammer out some hero-worship, and I reminded him that his record was probably cleaner than my own, because the years had given him less chance of sinning. And he was shocked by my levity, I think. Yes, it was at Langton, just before the Vicar went up the street to ring his bells for me."

Once again Sir Jasper was surprised by this Prince's close touch with the road of life as men follow it every day, his catholic, broad understanding of his fellows. It was the Stuart gift—the gift that had carried them to the throne or to the scaffold—that they had a kingly outlook on men's needs and their infirmities, and would not surrender, for any wind of circumstance that blew about them, their royal love for big or little of the men who trusted them. Sir Jasper was learning, indeed, what afterwards the folk in Skye were to learn—in Skye and in Glenmoriston and in a hundred lonely glens among the Highlands—that the Prince he served was the simplest and most human man, perhaps, among them all.

The wind dropped as they rode, and the sleet ceased falling for a while; and the sun, an hour before its setting, struck through the clouds that had hindered it all day. Lights, magical and vivid, began to paint the land's harsh face. The moorland peaks, to right and left, were crowned with fugitive, fast-racing mists of blue and green and rose colour; and ahead of them, astride the steep, curving rise of the highway, there was a belt of scarlet that seemed to flame the hills with smoky fire.

"Your land is beautiful, Sir Jasper," said the Prince, halting a moment to breathe his horse as they reached the hill-top. "I did not guess it when we rode south through sunless mire."

It is in time of defeat and stress that the deep chords of a man's soul are struck, and now Sir Jasper's face lit up. "My land of Lancashire—it is always beautiful to me. It cradled me. There's no midwinter bleakness can drive away remembrance of the pleasant days we've shared."

"You speak as men do who are married happily," laughed the Prince. "This barbarous country is just a wife to you, I think—her temper may be vile, but you remember gentler days."

Sir Jasper fell in with his mood, and smiled as if he jested; but he talked of matters very dear to the honest, simple heart of him. "I can count on my fingers, your Highness, the things in life that are of importance to me—my Faith, my Prince, the wife who's waiting for me over yonder at Windyhough, and my lads—and the dear moors o' Lancashire that bred me."

Their eyes met; and, somewhere from his tired, hunted mood, the Prince found a candour equal to Sir Jasper's own. "Faith first," he said quietly, "but your wife before your Prince, by your leave. I—I have not deserved well of you, Sir Jasper. I asked you to take me to the throne, and—I have given you this."

Sir Jasper thought of his wife, her weak caprices, the yapping of the toy spaniel that had its mimic cradle in their bedroom at Windyhough—thought of Rupert, who should have been beside him now—thought of all that had hindered him through these years. For he was not as young as his keen ardour wished, and these empty days of bodily hardship, with no reward of fight to hearten them, had sapped his courage. Yet he responded, bravely enough, to the challenge.

"My wife, God bless her! is—so dear that we'll not give her any place, your Highness. She claims her own, by right."

The Prince puffed gently at the disreputable, blackened pipe he cherished. He glanced at the hills, saw the next storm creep grey and wan across the sunset lights. "It is

a savage land," he said dispassionately. "I never guessed it could breed courtiers. Your wife, if she were near, would be pleased to know the temper of your constancy—it is hard and lithe as whiccord, sir, like a sword-blade forged by old Andrew Ferrara."

They jogged on again, at the foot pace to which the Prince had trained himself since Derby; and presently they came to a broad, grassy lane that led, wide to the left hand, into the sunset moors. And Sir Jasper checked his horse and sat rigidly in saddle, looking up the byway.

"What ails you?" asked the Prince.

"Remembrance," said Sir Jasper, turning his horse's head away from the road it knew by heart. "It is no time for rosemary, you think? And yet—"

"You talk in riddles."

"No, pardon me; I talk—of the road that leads to my own house of Windyhough—and to my wife—and to the son I left at home."

"Why, then, ride across and snatch a glimpse of them," said the other, quick to respond to the need of a man's heart.

"And desert a retreating army, your Highness?"

"There's no desertion. We are near our quarters for the night—and nothing happens, as you know, in the way of sudden battles. Our luck is out just now. Go, see your wife, sir—you've earned the holiday—and then ride across country to Langton. We march from there at daybreak."

"I do not ask ease," said Sir Jasper stubbornly. "We're following the road of discipline, and wives, I think, must wait."

The Prince glanced pleasantly at him. "Probe light or deep, sir, you're most amazingly a soldier." He smiled—so had Mary Stuart smiled once amid disaster, and so had Charles when he stepped to the scaffold—secure and gravely happy. "You will take your orders," he went on, "as good soldiers do. There was a breach of discipline—I forgot to

chide you when you spoke of it just now. I mean the duel you provoked with Lord Murray in the wood. Your punishment is—just to ride through the vile weather you breed up here and give my thanks to Lady Royd for the husband she lent so recklessly to barren leadership. And rejoin me with the dawn. I command you, sir!" he added sharply, seeing that Sir Jasper hesitated still.

"Then I obey, your Highness; but you will let me watch you out of sight."

"But why? Langton is so near. Are you afraid that another band of cavalry—cart-horse cavalry—will catch me up? Miss Demaine's mare, that carries me, will show them light heels enough."

Sir Jasper looked at this man, whose body and whose soul were kingly, this man to whom he had entrusted many dreams and sacrifices. And the tears were in his eyes again, he knew not why. "When a man loves deep, your Highness, he fears. I ask you to let me guard the road behind you."

"You love me? After this retreat—after the cursed roads and hopelessness—you—you love me? Say it again, sir."

"What else? None ever loved a Stuart yet by halves."

The Prince tapped him gently on the shoulder. "When better days come in," he said, "I shall make you acquainted with my Highlanders. They love as deep as you, and, knowing myself, I wonder at their blindness."

It was so they parted, wayfarers who had found leal comradeship and trust. And no momentary parting of the ways could ever sunder them again; for trust is not born among the crowded shows of life, but in the lonely byways where man meets man and finds him likeable.

Sir Jasper sat in saddle at the parting of the ways, and watched the Prince go slowly up the road. The long strain was telling on him, and the bitter wind chilled all his outlook for a moment. A sense of foreboding took him unawares. It seemed that the Prince, in riding so far behind his army, was courting death; as if he preferred to be overtaken, here

in England, rather than go back, a broken man, to his own land across the border.

"No!" he growled, with sharp contempt of the thought.
"He's heart-sick—but no coward."

He gave a last glance up the road, as one follows a departing friend long after he is lost to sight, sighed impatiently, and turned his horse into the bridle-way that led to Windyhough. Then he reined about, suddenly aware of galloping hoofs, of the fret of horses checked too sharply on the curb, of a harsh voice that bade him halt.

Goldstein's men had tracked their quarry, day after patient day, since their first attempt at Derby to capture the Prince's person. Three times they had found him so far behind his army that he seemed an easy prey; and three times—following what some would call a random whim, and others the guidance of the God he served—the Prince, not knowing his enemies were near, had grown tired of guarding the rear and had galloped forward suddenly to join his men and pass a jest among them. And Goldstein knew that his hold on the rough cavalry he led was weakening day by day. He had kept them to heel only by crude and persistent reminders that thirty thousand pounds, as represented by the Stuart, were worth some patience in the gaining.

Sir Jasper, reining sharply round, saw a company of men—a score or so—who wore the Hanoverian livery; and at the head of them was a blunt, red-featured officer who looked singularly like a farmer who had lived neighbour to the ale-barrel. And he knew them for the men who had given chase at Derby, though as yet they had no answering recollection of the friend who had ridden close beside the Prince's bridle-hand that day.

"Your business, sir?" asked Goldstein sharply. "You're too near the retreat to be let pass without a challenge. Besides"—with a laugh, following long scrutiny—"you've the look, somehow, of one of those cursed Jacobites."

"You flatter me, sir," said Sir Jasper coolly. "It has been

my business in life to feel like one—and, by your leave, it is pleasant that you know my breed at sight."

The sleet was drifting in quiet flakes before a wind that was tired for a while of its own speed. From the western spur of moor a long, slanting gleam of sunlight lit up this bleak land's loneliness—lit up Sir Jasper's figure as he sat, unconcerned, disdainful, in the saddle of a restive horse. For a moment the dragoons drew back; they had lived in a world where each fought for his own advancement only, and they were perplexed by this spectacle of a man who, alone and far behind retreating comrades, made open confession of his faith.

Goldstein swore roundly—not as the gently-born do in times of stress, but like a ploughboy when his team refuses to obey him. "Are you a fool, sir?" he sputtered.

"Well, yes," Sir Jasper answered gravely. "As much as my fellows. I'm human, sir, as you are."

The troopers laughed, and Goldstein felt his hold on them grow ever a little and a little less. "You're one of the Pretender's men?" he snarled. "We shoot all vermin of that sort at sight."

"No, sir. I am attached to the army of Prince Charles Edward. No man is a pretender when he asks only for his own again."

"Then you're tired of life?" said Goldstein, trying clumsily to catch something of Sir Jasper's easy handling of the situation.

"Again you are in the wrong. I never guessed, till now, how good life is. I have been riding with one stronger and better than myself—and after that I ride, when you are tired of questioning me, to the wife and the home I love. It is all so simple, if you would believe me."

Sir Jasper, under all his honesty of speech, was aware that he was delaying the advance of these rough-riders along the Langton road, was helping the Prince to safety while he rode so perilously behind his army. He was aware, too, in some

random way, as he listened to Goldstein's queer, guttural English, that he had been exact when he told Lady Royd, over and over again, that it was no civil war the Rising men had stirred up, but simply the resistance of the English to the foreign invader; a resistance old and stalwart as that of Hereward the Wake; a resistance that would last the English till they triumphed or they died.

Goldstein, his muddled wits stirred, may be, by some vision borrowed from Sir Jasper, knew his man at last. "It was you who rode with the Pretender, when we went near to capture you after Derby?"

"I was with the Prince," said Sir Jasper, with a smile that bewildered Goldstein and his troopers; "but, sir, you did not come near to capturing us. You were too—too clumsy, shall I say?"

Goldstein's troopers liked the free, courageous bearing of the man, and he knew it. "Well, we're here," he said dourly. "You admit little, but your life—it's not worth a poor man's purchase, surely?"

Sir Jasper took a look at the hills, as moor-bred men will do at these times. "It was worth a poor Man's purchase once—near two thousand years ago," he said, with the bearing of a man and the simplicity of a child who does not fear or doubt.

Goldstein had gone through many a rugged fight, overseas in Flanders; but the way of this man's courage was unfamiliar, and it daunted him.

"There are one-and-twenty of us," he said irresolutely, "and you're alone. You'll not fight single-handed?"

"No," said Sir Jasper, handling his snuff-box lazily and giving no outward sign that he had crossed himself. "No, in any case I shall not fight single-handed. Have you any further questions to ask, sir? The sun is getting down, and I've a ride before me."

To Goldstein this man's calm was insolence, and he knew that he was losing ground constantly with the men behind

him. "Yes, I've a question or two to ask," he snapped. "You can buy your life by a straight answer."

"But the price may be too heavy," protested Sir Jasper.

"You were with the Pretender soon after Derby, on your own confession."

"With Prince Charles Edward, by your leave," the other corrected, with the same pleasant smoothness.

"Oh, curse you! what do titles matter? The pretty boy with the love-locks—you were with him, that day we nearly took you both."

"I was with him, and it was a privilege. Believe me, sir, I have some miles to go, and dusk is coming on. Can I answer any other doubts you have—of my honesty, shall I say?"

Sir Jasper had glanced round, had seen a sheer wall of rock, twenty paces behind him, from which some farmer long ago had quarried the stones for his homestead on the moor above. He had chosen his vantage-ground; and still, through all this talk that gained a few moments by the way, he had only the one, simple-minded plan—to get his back to the wall, and fight single-handed till he dropped, and give his life to earn for his Prince a few more precious moments. He edged his horse backward gently—pretending that it was fidgeting on the curb—and drew near the quarry-face. He thought of Windyhough, of his wife and Rupert, of the free, hard-riding days behind; and then he thought no more of these things, but only of the narrow track of loyalty. It was so that the Lancashire gentry—the strong men among them—had trained themselves to live for the Stuart cause. And, as a man lives, so he finds himself prepared to die.

"You're the Prince's watch-dog," said Goldstein.

"May be. I wish he had a better."

"He's somewhere near then."

"That is vastly probable, sir." Sir Jasper glanced at the hills again, as if seeking counsel. These men had followed the retreat persistently. If he denied all knowledge of the

Prince's whereabouts, they would spur forward up the main road, would come in sight of that desolate, square-shouldered figure who stood, in his own person, for the strength, the gallantry, the hoping against odds, of this disastrous 'Forty-Five.

He sat in saddle, looking from the hills to the faces of these one-and-twenty troopers. He needed a ready tongue, and was more accustomed to straightforward action than to play of stratagem. He must keep these rascals dallying for as long as might be, must afterwards lengthen the fight to the last edge of his strength. He had a single purpose, and his hold on it was firm—to keep pursuit at bay until the Prince rode nearer to Langton and the night's bivouac than he did just now.

And as he tried to find words to relieve the burdensome, tense silence, Captain Goldstein blundered into one of those seeming inspirations that lead callous folk into the marshes, as moorland will-o'-wispies do. "The Pretender is afraid of the thirty thousand pounds on his head," he said, turning to the men behind him. "The watch-dog is waiting here at the turning that leads to his own home; the Pretender is out of sight; the plot is all so childish. Our road lies this way, and you, sir, will show it to us. The Pretender, I take it, is your guest to-night—if we don't catch him first? You will lead us, sir, I say."

Sir Jasper, his back to the quarry-wall now, could not grasp at once the help this captain of rough-riders was giving him. His mind was set on the simple business of gaining time by a fight to the death, and his hand was on his sword-hilt. "I never led a rabble yet," he said, with easy condescension, "and I am too old to learn new exercises."

Goldstein was in the company of a gentleman; and, knowing it, he winced. But he kept his temper; for his view of life was bounded by advancement, and he wished to make all sure in this big affair of capturing the Prince, dead or alive.

"You do not deny that the Pretender is making for your

own house?" he asked, with a sharp glance. "You're shepherding him along this bridle-track?"

"I would God that his Highness might lie safe at my own house of Windyhough to-night." Even now Sir Jasper found it hard to lie outright, though he realised suddenly that there was a better way of service than death at the quarry-face.

As it chanced, however, his words suggested evasion to Goldstein—evasion, and a manifest desire to cloak his errand. "You'll not show us the way, then? You're bent on being riddled through with bullets? Your sword's out—but it can whistle as it will. You shall answer it with musketry."

It was like Sir Jasper that he had forgotten their firearms when he drew his sword. Long companionship with those of his own breed had led him to expect, instinctively, that a score men, coming up against one, would at least meet him with his own weapon. He laughed at his own simplicity—laughed the more quietly because now it was of no consequence either way. His view of the Prince's safety grew broader every moment. It was not enough that he should head off pursuit from him until he had reached safety in to-night's camp at Langton. This company of horse had followed the retreat so diligently that to-morrow there would be danger to Stuart's person, and the next day after, and every day that found him riding at the rear of his sad Highlanders. The plain way of service, as Sir Jasper saw it now, was to take these nondescript cavalry across country, wide between the Lancashire hills, and so give the Prince a longer respite from pursuit.

"Am I privileged to change my mind?" he asked, putting his sword in sheath again.

"Allowed to save your skin?" said Goldstein, the bully in him quick to take advantage of any show of weakness in an adversary. "As for your mind—you may change it once, my friend, but not twice."

"I pledge my honour that I will lead you to Windyhough."

"Oh, your honour! That will be safe enough. You will lead, and my men carry their muskets loaded; and if anything goes wrong between this and Windyhough—you'll die for the Stuart, sir," he finished, with a savage grin.

"I make one condition only," went on the other suavely—"that I ride at my own pace."

"How far is Windyhough from here?" asked Goldstein, with suspicion.

"Ten miles."

"Then ride at any pace you like. If we crawl, we shall be there before the Pretender has well got through with supper, and our horses are none too fresh, I own."

Sir Jasper took a pinch of snuff, and rode out in silence from the quarry-face. He was easily master in this enterprise, and wondered that the gross body of the man could dull Goldstein's reason so completely.

"You will want to share the thirty thousand pounds with us?" said Goldstein, feeling now that his men were with him, answering to his brutal jests. "You've saved your skin, sir, and your house of Windyhough; and you need a little ready money in your pocket. Well, we shall see."

Sir Jasper was suddenly ashamed of what these men were thinking of him. Sensitive, alert, he gauged the meaning of Goldstein's insolence, of the troopers' careless laughter. They fancied this was the stuff the Prince's gentlemen were made of—to talk loftily one moment, and the next to play the traitor and the coward. They believed, these shock-headed rascals gathered from the foreign kennels, that a gentleman of Lancashire could rate his own life dearer than the Stuart's, could afterwards accept blood-money. And then, because he knew himself, Sir Jasper shrugged his shoulders, as if to rid them of an evil burden.

"We ride forward," he said, moving from the quarry-face and trotting to the head of the company.

"That is so," said Goldstein, with rough banter; "and re-

member, sir, that your honour—your Stuart honour—is guarded by one-and-twenty muskets, ready primed."

Again the troopers laughed; and again Sir Jasper's instinct was to vindicate himself. Then he remembered the dogged patience of another who rode—in safety, so far—at the rear-guard of his army. And he disdained the ill-favoured mob behind him.

They went up and down the bridle-track that threaded this white land of hills and cold austerity. It was a track whose every turning was a landmark to Sir Jasper, reminding him of other days. He had ridden it when he went hunting—when he went south to the wooing; when, afterwards, he needed respite from the lap-dog follies of his wife, from the knowledge that his heir was never likely, in this world, at least, to prove himself a man of action. This lane was thick with memories for him; but never, until now, had he ridden it a fugitive.

He thought of Derby and the sick retreat. He thought of many might-have-beens, and because the pain of it was so sharp and urgent he gathered up his courage. He held the Faith; he was strong and stubborn; and out of this windy ride to his own home he plucked new resolution.

They came—he and Goldstein's men—to Lone Man's Cross, a wayside monument that marked the spot where a travelling pedlar had been murdered long ago. And as he passed it Sir Jasper recalled how, as a boy, he had been afraid to ride by the spot at dusk. They came to the little kirk of St. Michael's on the Hill, and passed it wide on the left hand, and went down by way of Fairy-Kist Hollow, where the leafless rowans were gowned in frosted sleet. From time to time some ribald jest would come to him from one or other of the troopers; but he did not heed. One half of him was thinking of the memories this bridle-track held for him, of the hopes and fears and gallant dreams that had kept him company along it in the years gone by; the other half—the shrewd-witted, practical half—was content to know that each

mile they traversed was leading danger farther from the Prince, that each step of the rough, up-and-down track was telling on horses that were too southern in the build for this cross-country work. His own mare was lithe and easy under him, for she was hill-bred.

They rode forward slowly through a land that turned constantly a cold and sleety shoulder to them at every bend of the way. And they came to the Brig o' Tryst—a small and graceful bridge—to which, so country superstition said, the souls truly mated came at last.

"You live in a cursed climate, Sir Jasper," said Goldstein gruffly; "and gad! Your roads match it."

Sir Jasper was alert again. Some quality in Goldstein's voice roused in him a loathing healthy and inspiriting. Dreams went by him. He took hold of this day's realities, saw the strip of level going ahead, remembered that he was a short five miles now from Windyhough, with a game mare under him. There would be time to get into his own house, to barricade the doors; and afterwards there would be the swift, hard battle he had hungered for at Derby.

He put spurs to his mare, and she answered blithely. And Goldstein understood on the sudden what this gentleman of Lancashire had meant when he passed his word to lead them, at his own pace, to Windyhough.

"Halt! Fire!" he roared. "Are you daft, you fools?"

His men recovered from a surprise equal to his own. The light was wan and sleety, with mist coming down from the hills; but the fugitive was well in sight still as they brought their muskets to the shoulders. A sharp volley rang out between the silent hills, as if every trooper had pulled his trigger in instant answer to command. It seemed that one here and there of the shots would tell; but Sir Jasper went galloping over the level, and dipped down the further rise, and their horses would not answer when they tried to gallop in pursuit.

"So that is all the wars in Flanders taught you?" said

Goldstein savagely. "You should have brought your wives to shoot for you."

A low growl went up. These men were tired of Goldstein's leadership, tired of the hardship and bad weather. And their leader knew the meaning of that growl.

"Keep your cursed tempers," he said, with what to him was suavity. "There's the Pretender at the end of this day's journey—and a price on his head."

At Windyhough, Rupert and his mother sat in the parlour, with its faded scents and tapestries. They waited for great happenings that did not come their way; and they were sick at heart. Rupert was hungry for news of the father who was braver and stronger than he—the father whom he missed at every turn of the day's road. He had done his round of the house with Simon Foster; and Nance, who cheered his outlook for him whenever she came in sight, was absent on some wild hill-scamper, shared by the broken-winded horse who had grown close comrade to her.

Lady Royd, with the new-found motherhood that made her comelier, guessed what was passing in the boy's mind; and she fussed about him, when he was asking only for free air and the chance to fight like other men. And Rupert thought, with a shame that deadened all his outlook, of the years when he had stood, scholarly, ironical, apart from the blood and tears that meet wayfarers who take the open road. He saw it all, to-night when the peevish wind was beating through the draughty house—saw the weakness that had divided him from the open-air, good fellows who liked and pitied him.

"There's powder and shot stored here, and I know how to use them," he said, with light contempt of himself. "And yet nothing happens, mother. It is as Simon Foster says—'we're needing storms and earthquakes, just to make to-day a little different, like, fro' yesterday.'"

"Oh, your chance will come," said Lady Royd, with the pitiful feigning of belief that she thought was faith. "Your father taught you, just before he went, how to direct a siege.

You remember that he taught you?" she insisted. "He trusted you to hold Windyhough for the Prince."

Rupert laughed—a sudden, dreary laugh that startled her. "He taught me well. I've not forgotten the lesson, mother. But he knew there would be no siege. I heard him tell you so."

There was no sharp riding-in of enemies. The night was still, and empty, and at peace. Yet Lady Royd was plunged deep, by her own son, into tragedy and battle. She remembered the night of Sir Jasper's departure—the talk they had had in hall—her husband's weary confession that he had lied to Rupert, telling him a fairy-tale of the coming attack on Windyhough.

Rupert had overheard them, it seemed; and through all these days of strain and waiting he had not spoken of his trouble, had let it eat inward like a fire. As if in punishment for the indifference of earlier years, Lady Royd's perception of all that touched her son was clear to the least detail now. With her new gift of motherhood, of courting pain for its own sake, she retraced, step by step, the meaning of these last few days to Rupert. He had grown used to the sense that he stood apart from stronger men, unable to share full life with them; but always, behind it all, he had been sure, until a little while ago, that his father trusted him to prove his manhood one day.

She went to him, and put her arms about him, as any cottage mother might have done. "Oh, my boy—my boy!" she cried, understanding the fierceness, the loneliness, of this last trouble.

In this mood of his, with his back to the wall which no man asked him to defend, Rupert could have withstood many dangers; but sympathy exasperated him.

"It is hard for my father," he said, with desperate simplicity. "There was never a weak link in the Royd chain till I was born the heir. Why did I come to—to bring him shame?"

Some ruggedness, borrowed from the land that was hers by marriage, bade Lady Royd stand straight and take her punishment.

"I will tell you why," she said, her voice passionate and low; "I hindered you before your birth. I went riding when your father bade me rest at home—and my horse fell——"

"Just as mine did when I went to join the Rising," said Rupert, following his own train of thought. "Mother, I should have been with the Prince's army now if—if my horse had not stumbled."

Lady Royd crossed to the mantel, leaned her head awhile on the cool oak of it. "Yes," she said, turning sharply. "Yes, Rupert. It has taken five-and-twenty years—but I'm answering for that ride of mine."

He looked at her in wonder. And suddenly he realised that this beautiful, tired mother of his was needing help. She had not guessed what strength there was in her son's arms until he drew her close to him.

"What ails us, mother?" he asked, with surprising tenderness. "We've Windyhough, and powder and ball, and Lancashire may need us yet."

Hope took her unawares. This boy was transformed into a man of action; for only active men can glance from their own troubles to understand the weakness that is planted, like lavender, in the heart of every woman.

"I would God it needed us," she said, with a touch of her old petulance. "Lancashire men can sing leal songs enough——"

"Can live them, too. The hills have cradled us."

Lady Royd smiled, as if her heart were playing round her lips. "You're no fool, son of mine," she said. "I wish the Retreat were sweeping straight to Windyhough, instead of leaving us in peace. I wish you could be proved."

Rupert glanced shyly at her. He was son and lover both, diffident, eager, chivalrous. "Suppose there's no attack on the house, mother—suppose I were never proved? I have

learned so much to-night—so much. Surely there's something gained."

It was a moment of simple, intimate knowledge, each of the other. And the mother's face was flower-like, dainty; the spoilt wife's wrinkles were altogether gone.

"It is my turn to ask why," she said, with a coquetry that was rainy as an April breeze. "I've not deserved well of you, my dear—not deserved well at all, and have told you so; and you choose just this time—to honour me. Men are perplexing, Rupert. One never knows their moods."

Her toy spaniel began barking from somewhere at the far end of the house; and the old inconsequence returned from habit.

"Oh, there's poor Fido crying!" she said eagerly. "Go find him, Rupert. The poor little man is so sensitive—you know he's almost human, and he is crying for me."

And Rupert went out on the old, foolish quest—willingly enough this time. He had seen beneath the foolish, pampered surface of his mother's character, and was content to hold secure this newborn love for her, this knowledge that she needed him. He was needed—at long last.

"You look gay, master," said Simon Foster, meeting him down the corridor. "Well, it's each man to his taste; but I shouldn't have said, like, there was much to hearten a man these days."

"You've not sought in the right place," laughed the master.

And then Simon grinned, foolishly and pleasantly. For he remembered how he had helped Martha the dairymaid to milk the cows not long ago. "I'm not complaining," he said, guardedly.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RIDING IN

SIR JASPER, sure of his mare, had ridden hard toward Windyhough. He had promised, in good faith, that he would lead Captain Goldstein on the road, but he had not passed his word that he would ride at the pace of heavy cavalry. He heard the bullets singing, right and left and overhead, after Goldstein's call to fire; but the lean, hill-bred mare was going swiftly under him, and it was only five miles home to Windyhough. There had been a sharp pain in his left shoulder, a stab as if a red-hot rapier had pierced him, in the midst of the crackling musket-din behind him; but that was forgotten.

The mare galloped forward gamely. She was untouched, save for a bullet that had grazed her flank and quickened her temper to good purpose. Sir Jasper's spirits rose, as the remembered landmarks swept past him on the wind. His mind, his vision, his grip on forward hope, were singularly clear and strong. This was his holiday, after the sickness of retreat.

He had gained a mile by now. His pursuers, riding jaded horses, were out of sight and hearing behind the hump of Haggart Rise. He remembered, once again, the Prince's figure, riding solitary on the Langton road; and he was glad that these one-and-twenty louts were being led wide of their real quarry. And then he forgot the Stuarts, and recalled his wife's face, the tenderness he had for her, the peril he was bringing north to Windyhough. Behind him was Captain Goldstein, of unknown ancestry and doubtful morals, and with him a crowd of raffish foreigners, who would follow any cause that promised licence and good pay.

Sir Jasper saw the danger plainly. He was thinking, not

of the Prince's honour now, but of his wife's. He knew that he must win to Windyhough. And still his spirits rose; for this was danger, undisguised and facing him across the sleety, rugged hills he loved. Windyhough had stout walls, and powder and ball, and loopholes facing to the four points of the compass; Simon Foster would be there, and Rupert could pull a trigger; it would be in the power of this little garrison to hold the house, to pick off, one by one, this company of Goldstein's until the rest took panic and left it to its loneliness.

It was a hazard to his liking, and Sir Jasper's face was keen and ruddy as he clattered down and up the winding track. He was a short mile now from Windyhough, and he eased his mare because she showed signs of trouble.

"We've time and to spare, lass," he muttered, patting her neck. "No need to kill you for the Cause."

And then—from the midst of his eagerness and hope—a sickness crept over the horseman's eyes. His left shoulder was on fire, it seemed; and, glancing down, he saw dimly that his riding-coat was splashed with crimson. The mare, feeling no command go out across the reins, yielded to her own weariness, and halted suddenly. Sir Jasper tried to urge her forward; but his hand was weak on the bridle, and the grassy track, the hills, the flakes of sleet, were phantoms moving through a nightmare prison.

He had come to the gate of Intake Farm, and the farmer—Ben Shackleton by name—was striding up the road to gather in some ewes from the higher lands before the snow began to drift in earnest.

"Lord love you, sir!" he said nonchalantly, catching Sir Jasper as he slid helplessly from saddle. "Lord love you, sir, you're bleeding like a pig!"

"It's nothing, Ben." Even now Sir Jasper kept his spacious contempt of pain, his instinct to hide a wound as if it were a crime. "Help me to horse again. My wife needs me—needs me, Ben."

Then he yielded to sheer sickness for a moment; and Ben Shackleton, who was used to helping lame cattle, grew brisk and businesslike. "Here, William!" he called to a shepherd who was slouching in the mistal-yard. "Come lend a hand, thou idle-bones! Here's master ta'en a hurt, and he's a bulkier man than me. We've got to help him indoors to the lang-settle."

Sir Jasper, by grace of long training, was able to keep his weakness off for a space of time that seemed to him interminable. He saw Windyhough at the mercy of these rabbouts of Goldstein's—saw his wife standing, proud, disdainful, pitiful, while they bandied jests from mouth to mouth.

"It's nothing, Ben, I tell you!" he muttered testily. "Help me to saddle."

He staggered forward, tried to mount, fell back again into Ben's arms. And still he would not yield. And then at last he knew that Windyhough would not see him to-day, if ever again; and the pity he had for his wife, left defenceless there by his own doing, was like a knife cutting deep and ceaselessly into his living flesh.

He was in torment, so that his wound, save that it hampered him, seemed a trivial matter. To Ben Shackleton and the shepherd all passed in a few minutes; they did not guess how long the interval was to Sir Jasper between this going down to hell and the first ray of hope that crossed the blackness.

Sir Jasper passed a hand across his eyes. If only he could understand this sudden hope, the meaning of it—if his wits were less muddled—there was a chance yet for Windyhough. Then he remembered Rupert—his son, to whom he had told a fairy-tale of gunpowder and ball, and the defence of the old house—and a weight seemed lifted from him. He recalled how he had said to the boy's mother that Rupert was leal and stubborn at the soul of him, however it might be with his capacity for every-day affairs. He smiled, so that Ben and the shepherd, looking on, thought that he was fey; for he

was thinking how weak in body he himself was, how, like Rupert, he had only his leal soul to depend upon.

Then, for the last time before he surrendered to the weakness that was gripping him in earnest, he had a moment of borrowed vigour. "Ben," he said, in the old tone of command, "you've your horse ready saddled?"

"Aye, sir!" answered the other, bewildered but obedient.

"Ride hard for Windyhough. There's a troop of the enemy close behind. Gallop, Ben, and tell my son"—he steadied himself, with a hand on the shepherd's shoulder—"tell him that he must hold the house until I come, that I *trust him*, that he knows where the powder is stored. Oh, you fool, you stand gaping! And there is urgency."

"I'm loath to leave you, Sir Jasper——"

"You'll be less loath, Ben," broke in the other, with a fine rallying to his shattered strength, "if I bring the blunt side of my sword about your ears."

So Ben Shackleton, troubled and full of doubt, got to horse, following that instinct of obedience which the master had learned before he taught it to his men, and rode up the windy track. Sir Jasper, when he had seen him top the rise and disappear in the yellow, dreary haze, leaned heavily against the shepherd.

"Now for the lang-settle, since needs must," he said, with a last bid for gaiety. "I can cross the mistal-yard, I think, with a little help. So, shepherd! It heaves like a ship in storm; it heaves, I tell you; but my son out yonder—my son at Windyhough—oh, the dear God knows, shepherd, that I taught him—taught him how to die, I hope!"

They crossed the mistal-yard, blundering as they went; and somehow the shepherd got Sir Jasper into the cheery, firelit house-place, and on to the lang-settle. Ben Shackleton's wife was baking an apple-pasty when they came in, and glanced up. If she felt surprise, she showed none, but wiped the flour from her arms with her apron, and crossed to the settle. She looked at Sir Jasper as he lay in a white

and deathlike swoon, and saw the blood oozing from his wounded shoulder.

Shackleton's wife was quick of tongue and quick of her hands. "Take thy girt lad's foolishness out o' doors, William!" she snapped. "I know how to dress a wound by this time, or should do, seeing how oft Shackleton lames himself by using farm-tools carelessly. Shackleton has a gift that way."

The shepherd passed out into the windy, cheerless out-o'-doors. He knew the mistress in this humour, and preferred a chill breeze from the east. As he crossed the mistal-yard he saw a company of horsemen, riding jaded nags; and they were grouped about Sir Jasper's mare, that, too tired to move, was whinnying for her absent master.

"Hi, my man!" said Goldstein. "Whose mare is this?"

"Sir Jasper Royd's," the shepherd answered. His voice was low and pleasant, as the way of Lancashire folk is when they prepare to meet a bullying intrusion.

"Then he's here?"

"No," said the shepherd, after picking a straw from the yard and chewing it with bucolic, grave simplicity. "No. Sir Jasper changed horses here, and rode for Windyhough."

"How far away?"

The shepherd thought of Sir Jasper, lying yonder on the lang-settle. He was touched, in some queer way, by the master's gallantry in the dark hour of retreat. He was so moved that he was brought, against his will, to tell a lie and stick to it.

"Oh, six mile or so, as the crow flies—more by road," he said nonchalantly. "Ye'd best be getting forrad, if ye want to win there by nightfall."

Goldstein mistook this country yokel's simplicity for honest dullness. Men more in touch with the Lancashire character had done as much before his time, especially when horse-dealing was in progress on market days. "You look honest, my man," he said, stooping to slip a coin into Wil-

liam's hand. "Tell me what sort of road it is from here to Windyhough."

"Well, as for honest," said the other, with the vacant grin that was expected of him, "I may be honest as my neighbours, if that be much to boast of; and it's a terrible ill-found road, for sure. Best be jogging forrad, I tell ye."

"It's cursed luck, men," said Goldstein, spurring his horse into the semblance of a trot; "but we're hunting big game this time. A mile or two needn't matter. There's the Pretender at Windyhough, remember, and a nice bit of money to be earned."

The shepherd watched them over the hilltop, then glanced at the piece of silver lying in his palm. There was so much he might do with this money—might buy himself a mug or two of ale at the tavern in the hollow, just by way of changing the crown-piece into smaller coin—and he was "feeling as if he needed warming up, like, after all this plaguy wind."

He glanced at the coin again, with a wistfulness that was almost passionate. Then he spat on it, and threw it into the refuse from the mistal lying close behind.

"Nay, I'll have honest ale, or none," he growled, and crossed quietly to the house, and stood on the threshold, looking in.

He saw Shackleton's wife bending over Sir Jasper, who lay in a swoon so helpless and complete that it was like a child's sleep—a sleep tired with the day's endeavours, yet tranquil and unfearful for the morrow's safety.

"Oh, it is thee, is't?" said Shackleton's wife, facing round. "Well, he's doing nicely—or was, till ye let in all this wind that's fit to rouse a body from his grave."

"Well-a-day, mistress," said the shepherd, with a pleasant grin, "if that's your humour, I'm for the mistal-yard again. It's rare and quiet out there."

"Nay, now," she said, glancing up with sharp, imperious kindness. "Shut t' door, lad, and sit thee down by th' peats, and keep a still tongue i' thy head. I wouldn't turn

a dog out into all this storm that's brewing up. And, besides, Sir Jasper's mending. I'd doubts of him at first; but he's sleeping like a babby now. We'll keep watch together, till Shackleton comes home fro' his ride to Windyhough. He'll not be long, unless the maids there 'tice him to gossip and strong ale."

"I might smoke, mistress—just, like, to pass the time?"

"Aye, smoke," snapped Shackleton's wife. "Men were always like bairns, needing their teething-rings, in one shape or another."

"Better than spoiling their tempers," said the shepherd. And he lit his pipe from a live peat, and said no more; for he was wise, as men go.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GLAD DEFENCE

AT Windyhough the gale sobbed and moaned about the leafless trees that sheltered it from the high moors. Sleet was driving against the window-panes, and there was promise, if the wind did not change, of heavy snow to follow. And indoors were Lady Royd and Nance, the women-servants, and the men too old to carry arms behind Sir Jasper—these, and the lean scholar who was heir to Windyhough.

Simon Foster—he who had carried a pike in the '15 Rising, and felt himself the watch-dog here—had been moving restlessly up and down all day, like a faithful hound whose scent is quick for trouble. And now, near three of the afternoon, he was going the round of the defences once again with the young master.

"You're not looking just as gay as you were yesternight," he growled, snatching a glance at Rupert's face. "Summat amiss wi' the Faith ye hold by, master?"

Rupert was sick with bitter trouble, sick with inaction and the frustration of long hopes; yet he held his head up suddenly and smiled. "Nothing amiss with that," he answered cheerily. "I'm too weak to carry it at times, that is all, Simon."

Simon stroked his cheek thoughtfully. "Well, it's all moonshine to me—speaking as a plain man; but I've noticed it has a way o' carrying folk over five-barred gates and walls too high to clamber. For my part, I'm weary, dead weary; and I see naught before us, master, save a heavy snowstorm coming, and women blanketing us wi' whimsies, and a sort o' silent, nothing-doing time that maddens a body. You've the gift o' faith—just tell me what it shows you, Maister Rupert."

The master laughed. It tickled his humour that he, who was wading deep in sickness and disillusion, should be asked for help in need by this grizzled elder, who had loved and pitied him, who had tried, these last days, to teach him the right handling of a musket. "Just this, Simon—square shoulders, and a quick eye, and the day's routine ahead. What else?"

"Then faith is a soldier's game, after all."

"Yes, a soldier's game," Rupert answered dryly.

And so they went forward from room to room, from loophole to loophole, that cast slant, grey eyes on the sleet that was blowing across the troubled moonlight out of doors. And, at the end of the round, after Simon had gone down to see if he could catch a glimpse of Martha in the kitchen, Rupert heard the sound of spinet keys, touched lightly from below. And then he heard Nance Demaine singing the ballads that were dear to him, and a sudden hunger came upon him.

He went down to the parlour, stood silent in the doorway. Lady Royd was upstairs, putting her toy spaniel to bed with much ceremony; and Nance was alone with the candlelight and the faded roseleaf scents. With ache of heart, with a longing strong and troublesome, he saw the trim figure, the orderly brown hair, the whole fragrant person of this girl who was singing loyal ballads—this girl who kept his feet steady up the hills of endeavour, and of longing for the battle that did not come his way.

And the mood took Nance to sing a ballad of the last Stuart Rising, thirty years ago, when all was lost because the leaders of the enterprise were weaker than the men who rode behind them.

"There's a lonely tryst to keep, wife,
All for the King's good health.
God knows, when we two bid farewell
I give him all my wealth."

It was the song of a cavalier, written to his wife the night

before he went to execution for the Stuart's sake. And it had lived, this ballad, because to its core it rang true to the heart's love of a man. And Nance was singing it as if she understood its depth and meaning. This was the man's love, royal, simple, courageous, of which she had talked to Lady Royd not long ago, for which she had been laughed at by the older woman. Yet one man at least had found grace to carry such love with him unblemished to the scaffold. The resignation, the willing sacrifice for kingship's sake summed up by "the lonely tryst to keep," as if this were a little matter—the human note of loss and heartbreak when she reached the last love confession, strong, tender, final in its simplicity—Nance's voice found breadth and compass for them all, as if she had stood by this cavalier long dead, feeling pulse by pulse with him. And so, in a sense, she had; for these royalists of Lancashire had faults and weaknesses in plenty, but they had been strong in this—from generation to generation they had reared their children to a gospel resolute and thorough as the words of this old ballad.

Nance lingered on those last words as if they haunted her—"I give him all my wealth." And Rupert, standing in the doorway, was aware that, even to his eyes, Nance had never shown herself so tender and complete. She leaned over the spinet, touching a key idly now and then; and her thoughts were of Will Underwood, who had courage of a sort, a fine, reckless horsemanship that was needed by the Rising; of Wild Will, whose whole, big, dashing make-believe of character was ruined by a mean calculation, a need to keep house-room and good cheer safe about him. She remembered her trust in him, their meeting on the moor, the sick, helpless misery that followed. And then she thought of Rupert, standing scholarly and apart from life—no figure of a hero, but one whom she trusted, in some queer way, to die for the faith that was in him, if need asked. And then again she laughed, a little, mournful laugh of trouble and bewilderment. Life seemed so wayward and haphazard, such a waste

of qualities that were hindered by weaknesses tragic in their littleness. If Rupert's steady soul could be housed in Will Underwood's fine, dominant body, the world would see a man after its own heart.

And Rupert had his own thoughts, too, in this silence they were sharing. He knew to a heart-beat the way of his love for Nance, the gladness and the torture of it; and again he wondered, with passionate dismay, that he had done so little to make himself a man of both worlds, ready to fight through the open roads for her. He had given her a regard that, by its very strength and quality, was an honour in the giving and the receiving; he had built high dreams about her, feeling her remote and unattainable; but he had failed in common sense, in grasp of the truth that a man, before he reaches the hilltops where high dreams find reality, must climb the workaday, rough fields. He understood all this, knew for the first time that his father had been just in leaving him behind, because the fighting-line needs men who can use their two hands, can sit a horse, can face, not death only but all the harsh, unlovely details that war asks of men. His humiliation was bitter and complete. There was Nance, sitting at the spinet, the gusty candlelight playing about her trim, royal little figure, and she was desirable beyond belief; and yet he knew that she stood, not for faith only but for deeds, that he had only gone a few paces on the road that led to the fulfilment of his dreams.

The silence was so intimate, so full of the strife that hinders comrade souls at times, that Nance knew she was not alone. She glanced up, saw Rupert standing in the doorway, read the misery and longing in his face. For women have a gift denied to men—they see us as an open book, clear for them to read, while we can only sight them at odd moments, like startled deer that cross the mountain mists.

"You're sad, my dear," she said, with pleasant handling of the intimacy that had held between them since they were boy and girl together,

"No," he answered, hard pressed and dour. "I am—your fool, Nance, as I always was."

"Come sit beside me," she commanded. "I shall sing Stuart songs to you—sing them till you hear the pipes go screealing up Ben Ore, till I see the good light in your face again."

Her tenderness was hard to combat. "I need no Stuart songs," he said, with savage bluntness.

"Why, then, you're changeable. You liked them once."

"I'll like them again, Nance—but not to-night. It is Stuart deeds I ask, and they do not come my way."

Rupert had crossed to the spinet, and, as he stood looking down at her with grave eyes, Nance was aware of some new mastery about him, some rugged strength that would have nothing of this indoor, parlour warmth.

"Rupert, what is amiss with you?" she asked gravely.

He was himself again—scholarly, ironic. "What is amiss? You, and the house where I'm left among the women, because I have learned no discipline—it is a pleasant end, Nance, to my dreams of the riding out. Your fool, listening to his mother's spaniel whining as she puts him to bed, and the empty house, and the wind that calls men out to the open—just that."

She came near to understanding of him now. While there was peace, and no likelihood at all of war, he had been content, in his odd, indifferent way, to stand apart from action. But now that war had come he reached back along the years, ashamed and impotent, for the training other men had undergone—the training that made his fellows ready to follow the unexpected call, the sudden hazard.

"It is cruel!" said Nance, with a quick, peremptory lifting of the head. "You could fight, if only they would let you——"

"Just so. The bird could fly, if its wings had not been broken in the nest."

She knew this dangerous, still mood of his. He was a

civilian, untrained, unready, left at home while stronger men were taking the hardships. In every line of his face, in the resolute, dark eyes, there was desperate shame and self-contempt; and yet he fancied he was hiding all show of feeling from her. Nance felt the pity of it—felt more than pity—found the tears so ready that she turned again to the spinet and began playing random odds and ends of ballads. And through all the stress she took a grip of some purpose that had been with her constantly these last days. Will Underwood—his dominant, big person, his gift of wooing—had gone from her life. She was lonely and afraid, and found no help except along the road of sacrifice—the road trodden hard and firm by generations of women seeking help in need.

"Let me mend your life for you," she said, glancing up with bewildering appeal and tenderness.

Rupert was young to beguilement of this sort. Her eyes were kindly with him. There was a warmth and fragrance round about the parlour that hindered perception of the finer issues. And he knew in this moment that even a good love and steady can tempt a man unworthily.

From the moors that guarded Windyhough there came a sudden fury of the wind, a rattle of frozen sleet against the windows. And Rupert lifted his head, answering the bidding of the open heath. "You cannot mend my life," he said sharply. "How could you, Nance?"

"You thought so once." Her glance was friendly, full of affection and great liking; and so well had she been schooling herself to the new, passionate desire for sacrifice that Rupert read more in it than the old comradeship. "What have I done, that I cannot help you now?"

He was dizzied by the unexpectedness, the swiftness of this night surprise. Here was Nance, her face turned eagerly toward him, and she was reminding him of the devotion he had shown her in years past. He had no key to the riddle, could not guess how desperate she was in her wish to hide Will Underwood's indignities under cover of this sacrifice for

Rupert's sake—Rupert, whom she liked so well and pitied.

"Shall I not sing to you now?" she repeated, with pleasant coquetry. "If you have no Stuart songs—why, let me sing you Martha's doleful ballad of Sir Robert who rode over Devilsbridge, and came riding back again without his head. It was a foolish thing to do, but it makes a moving ballad, Rupert."

Her mood would not be denied. Tender, gay, elusive, she tempted him to ask what she was ready—for sake of sacrifice—to give. There was reward here for the empty boyhood, the empty days of shame since the men of the house rode out. It was all unbelievable, unsteady. He had only to cross to Nance's side, it seemed, had only to plead, as he had done more than once in days past, for the betrothal kiss. He recalled how she had met these wild love-makings of his—with pity and a little laughter, and a heart untouched by any sort of love for him. And now—all that was changed.

The moment seemed long in passing. Within reach there was Nance, desirable beyond any speech of his to tell; and yet he could not cross to her. It was as if a sword divided them, with its keen edge set toward him. He did not know himself, could not understand the grip that held him back from her, though feet and heart were willing. Then it grew clear to him.

"Nance," he said sharply, "do you remember the Brig o' Tryst?"

"Why, yes," she answered, with simple tenderness. "I remember that I hurt you there. You pleaded so well that day, Rupert—and now you're dumb, somehow."

"Because—Nance, there has war come since then, and it has proved us all." He laughed, the old, unhappy laugh of irony and self-contempt. "There's Simon Foster, bent with rheumatism, and Nat the Shepherd, too infirm to do anything but smoke his pipe and babble of the '15 Rising, and—your fool, Nance. You've a gallant house of men about you."

And Nance was silent. Some deeper feeling than pity or

haphazard sacrifice was stirring her, for she saw Rupert as he was, saw him with a clearness, a knowledge of him, that would never leave her. In retreat, against his will, in utter darkness of hope and forward purpose, he had found the right way and the ready to Nance's heart. His grip of honour was so resolute. There was nothing scholarly or fanciful about him now. Through temptation of her own making, through a desire extreme and passionate and easy to be read, he had won through to this starry sort of abnegation that set well on him. He was no proven man, and he disdained for that reason to claim a woman's favours; and the breed of him showed clear.

The wind swept down from the moors with a snarl that set the windows shaking. And Rupert, without a backward glance, went into the hall and opened the main door. The wind came yelping in, powdering the threshold with driven sleet and chilling him to the bone. He was aware only of heart-sickness, of the fragrance that was Nance Demaine, of his need to get out into the open road; and there was something in the lash of the sleet across his face that was friendly as the moors he loved.

And as he stood there he heard the *tippety-tap* of hoofs, far down the bridle-road that led to Windyhough. And hope, a sudden vivid hope, returned to him. He had not needed the warm, scented parlour, the songs of old allegiance; but, to the heart of him, he was eager for this music of a hard-riding man who brought news, maybe, of Stuart deeds.

Tippety-tap, tappety-tip, the sound of hoofs came intermittently between the wind-bursts, and it seemed now to be very near the gate. While he waited, his head bent eagerly toward the track, Lady Royd came downstairs after bidding her spaniel good-night, shivered as the wind swept through the hall, and ran forward fretfully when she saw Rupert standing in the doorway.

"My dear, is it not cold enough already in the house?" she

complained. "You need not let the wind in through open doors."

"Listen, mother!" he said, not turning his head. "There's a horseman riding fast. He is bringing news."

"Oh, you are fanciful. This Hunter's Wind always sent your wits astray, Rupert. You heard too many nursery-tales of the Ghostly Hunt, and Gabriel's Hounds, and all their foolish superstitions."

"I hear a rider coming up with news," said Rupert obstinately, moving out into the courtyard. "It may be Olyphant of Muirhouse."

Simon Foster, at this time, was just outside the gate, working to the last edge of dusk to get in a few more barrow-loads of wood for the indoor fires. Not all the scoldings of the other servants had persuaded him to so necessary a bit of work, but Martha had, when she drew a tearful picture of the cold kitchen they would have to sit in to-night if he failed them. There were barely logs enough, it seemed, to feed the rest of the house, and the kitchen must go fireless. And Simon, with steady contempt of household labour when he longed to be out in the open fight, had grumbled his way to the pile of tree-trunks that littered the outside of the courtyard.

"And I thought myself a fighting man," he muttered, sawing and chopping with a speed born, not of zeal, but of ill-temper; "and the end of it all is just bringing wood in, so that silly wenches can sit up late and gossip over a wasteful fire. Well, life's as it's made, I reckon, but I'm varry thankful I had no hand i' the making."

He had filled his barrow, and was stooping to the handles, when he, too, heard the beat of hoofs come ringing up between the wind-beats. The storm, perhaps, had stirred even his unfanciful outlook upon life; for he was strangely restless to-night, and ready to believe that some miracle might come to rouse them from their fireside life at Windyhough. He turned his head up-wind, one hairy ear cocked like a span-

iel's, and listened for a while. The gale began to fall a little, and he could hear the quick, recurrent *tippety-tap* more frequently.

He left his barrow, hobbled across the courtyard, saw Rupert and his mother standing in the light of the scudding moon that fought for mastery with the gloaming.

"There's a horse galloping, Simon," said Rupert. "Did you hear him?"

"Ay, I heard him right enough; and I'm wondering who the rider is. It might be Sir Jasper, or it might be one o' Maister Oliphant's wild-riding breed——"

"Oh, you're mistaken, both of you!" broke in Lady Royd fretfully. "The snow would deaden hoof-beats. I can hear none, I tell you."

"Nay," said Simon stolidly, "the road's harder than the snow's soft just yet. By and by it will be different, when the wind drops. We'll be snowed up by morn, my lady."

And now her untrained ear caught the *tippety-tap*, the ring of a gallop close at hand. "It may be Sir Jasper," she echoed. "Oh, I trust you are right, Simon—so long as he rides unwounded," she added, quick to find the despondent note.

The wind was settling fast. Now and then it yelped and whined like a dog driven out from home on a stark night; but the snow was falling ever a little more steadily, more thickly. And into the blur of snow and moonlight, across the last edge of the gloam, the galloping horseman rode through the open gate into the courtyard, and pulled up, and swung from saddle. He looked from one to another of those who stood this side the porch.

"Is that you, Master Rupert?" he asked, without sign of haste or emotion.

"Yes, Shackleton. What's your news?"

"Sir Jasper's lying at my farm. He's ta'en a hurt, and sent me forrad—seeing he couldn't come himself—and he said to me that you're to keep Windyhough against a plaguy lot o' thieves."

"What thieves, Ben?"

"Nay, I know not. He said they were riding an odd mile or two behind, and no time to waste."

Lady Royd was crying softly in the background, secure in her belief that the worst had happened and that her husband's hurts were mortal. Rupert did not heed her, did not heed anything except the tingling sense of mastery and strength that was firing his young, unproved soul. Through the long nights and days of self-contempt he had longed for this. When his heart had been sick to find himself among the women and the greybeards, he had fought, as if his life depended on it, for the dim hope that his chance would come one day. And, because he was prepared, there was no surprise in Shackleton's news, no hurried question as to how this sudden onset must be met.

"My father sent no other message, Ben?" he asked curtly,

"Aye, he did, and he seemed rare and anxious I shouldn't forget it, like. He said he *trusted* you—just trusted you."

Rupert had kept his watch, through the sickness of the waiting-time; and at the end of it was this trumpet-call from the father who had bred him. And Simon Foster, watching him with affection's close scrutiny, saw the scholarly, lean years slip off from the shoulders that were squared already to the coming stress.

"Bar the outer gate, Simon," he said. Then, with a soldier's brisk attention to detail, he turned to Ben Shackleton. "How many of them?" he asked.

"A score or more, so Sir Jasper said."

"Then step indoors. We need you, Ben."

Shackleton made a movement to get up to saddle again. "Nay, nay! I've the kine to fodder, and a wife waiting for me."

"I'm in command here," said the master sharply. "We need you, and you say there's no time to waste."

Simon Foster came back from drawing the stout oaken bars across the gate. "They're riding up the gap," he said.

"I could hear their horses slipping all ways, master, as if the roads had teased 'em; but they're riding varry near. We haven't a year and a day to waste in talk, though Shackleton fancies we have. Besides," he added grimly, "the gate's barred, and they'll be here before you could open it and ride through."

"What's to be done with my horse, supposing I did stay?" asked Shackleton. Like a true farmer, he was not to be hurried, and his first thought was always for his live-stock.

Simon Foster snatched the bridle from his hand, went across to the stables, and was back again before Shackleton had recovered from his surprise.

"That is horse-stealing, Simon, or summat like it," grumbled the farmer.

"No," answered Simon, "it's horse-keeping. We need you, Ben. The master spoke a true word there."

"And what's all the moil about? I relish a square fight as well as another; it's a bit of a holiday, like, fro' farming peevish lands; but I like to know just what I'm fighting for. Stands to plain reason I do."

"For the honour of the Royds," said Rupert, with sharp appeal.

"Well, then, you have me, master. Just tell me what I've to do; I'm slow i' my wits, but quick wi' my hands, and always was; and I learned young to fire a musket."

"It's a varry good habit to learn," growled Simon Foster, "'specially when a body learns it young." And then again he turned his head sharply. "They've come, I reckon, master," he said, with stolid satisfaction.

Goldstein's men had ridden the last mile of their journey in evil temper. The track was rough, full of steep hills and sharp, dangerous corners that rendered it difficult enough in a dry season; in this weather, and in the snowy, muddled light, it seemed impassable to horsemen used only to flat country. They were hungry, moreover, and wet to the skin, and their only achievement so far was to lose the first fugitive they

had pursued since Derby town was left behind. Goldstein himself was thankful for one thing only—that this lonely track had no byways opening out on either hand. The road, twist as it would, kept to its single line, showing them no choice of route in a country unknown and difficult.

It seemed interminable, this travelling at a slow, uneasy trot over broken ground; but, just as he began to fear that his men would mutiny outright, he looked up the rise ahead and saw lights twinkling through the moonlit storm of snow. The lights were many, blinking down on him from a house that surely, by the length of its front, was one of quality.

"We're home, my lads," he said, with a sharp laugh of relief. "That yokel lied about the distance."

"Time we were," snarled one of the troopers, with a rough German oath.

Goldstein did not heed, but slipped from saddle and put a hand to the courtyard gate. When he found it barred, he thrust his heavy bulk against it. It did not give to his weight. And this daunted him a little; for he had not looked for resistance of any sort, once they had reached the end of this long, hilly road. He had pictured, indeed, a house of women, with only the Prince and Sir Jasper to stand against them, a swift surprise, and after that food and licence and good liquor to reward them for the hardships of the day. He kicked the gate impatiently, and cried to those within to open; and the dogs shut up in kennel answered him with long, running howls.

Rupert standing with Simon Foster on the threshold of the porch, felt gaiety step close to his elbow, like a trusted friend. He crossed the yard and stood just this side the gateway.

"Who knocks?" he asked.

"The King," snapped Goldstein.

"You will be more explicit," said Rupert, with a touch of the old scholarly disdain. "By your voice, I think you come from Hanover. We serve the Stuart here."

Through the spite of the falling wind, through his weariness,

ness of mind and body, Goldstein knew that a gentleman stood on the far side of this gateway. And breeding, in a farm-hand or a king, disturbed his sordid outlook on this life.

"You'll not serve him long. Where's Sir Jasper Royd?"

"Somewhere on the open road, following his Prince. I am his son, and master here, at your service, till he returns."

Nance, hearing the confusion out of doors, had run into the courtyard. Lady Royd was standing apart, as if nothing mattered, now she had heard that Sir Jasper lay wounded at the farm; if her man had not been strong enough to ride in and guard her at such a time, he must be near to death, she felt. She had made him her idol, starving her sons of love because the father claimed it; and she was paying her debts now, in confusion and humiliation. Nance scarcely heeded her. Her eyes passed from Simon and Ben Shackleton to the slim, erect figure at the gate, and instinctively she crossed to Rupert's side. There was peril on the far side of this gate—peril grave and urgent—and yet she was conscious only of a thrill of pride and tenderness. The scholar had longed for his chance to come; and the answer had reached him, without warning or preparation, from the heart of the stormy night. Her thoughts were running fast; she contrasted Will Underwood's response to the first call of the Rising with Rupert's gay acceptance of this hazard; and she was glad to be here at Windyhough.

"Sir Jasper's 'on the open road, following his Prince'?" mimicked Goldstein, breaking the uneasy silence. "To be plain, he has followed the Pretender indoors here, and I know it."

Rupert had known only that he was bidden to guard the house against what Shackleton had named "a plaguy lot o' thieves," had accepted the trust with soldierly obedience; but the venture showed a new significance. He was cool-headed, practical, now that his years of high dreaming were put to

the touchstone; and he snatched at Goldstein's explanation of this night assault.

"You think the Prince is a guest here at Windyhough?" he asked suavely.

"I know it. We've followed the two of them over the foulest bridle-track in England—just because we were so sure."

Sir Jasper's heir looked at the sturdy, snow-blurred gate that stood between the honour of his house and these troopers, whose oaths, with an odd lack of discipline, threaded all their leader's talk. And he laughed, so quietly that Nance glanced sharply up, thinking his father had returned; for Sir Jasper carried just this laugh in face of danger.

"The Prince is here?" he said. "Then hack your way through the gate and take him. He is well guarded."

Goldstein, chilled for a moment by the unexpected strength of the defence, grew savage. "You'll not surrender?"

"No Royd does, sir. We live leal, or we die leal."

"Then God help you when my troopers hack a way in! They're not tame at any time, and your cursed roads have not smoothed their tempers."

"We are waiting," said the master quietly.

"Oh, well done, Rupert!" whispered Nance, with a light touch on his arm.

He looked down at her—down and beyond her, for in truth he had no need of Stuart glamour till this night's business was well through. "You Nance? Get back to the house, and take my mother with you; the gate will be down, I tell you, and after that—it will be no place for women. And, Simon," he added, "bring three muskets out. Hurry, man!"

Nance, high-spirited and new to commands of this sharp, peremptory kind, went submissively enough, she knew not why. And, near the porch, she found Lady Royd busy with the spaniel which had run out to find her.

"Poor little man!" Sir Jasper's wife was murmuring, as she kissed the foolish, pampered brute that, under happier,

auspices, would have been a dog. "He missed me, Nance, and he came, getting wet feet in the snow, and you know how delicate he is. He is all I have, Nance," she added, with a touch of pathos, real in its futility "since—since they told me Sir Jasper was dying at the farm."

Nance remembered how Rupert had met the sudden call to arms, and gathered something of his buoyancy. "Sir Jasper is not dying," she said sharply. "I'll not believe it. He will come by and by, when he has recovered from his wound—"

"You think he will come?" put in the other, helpless and snatching at any straw of comfort.

"Oh, I know it; but we must get indoors, and let Rupert guide the siege."

Lady Royd had not learned the true gaiety of danger; but Nance, from the childhood shared with hard-riding brothers, had gained a courage and experience that served her well just now. None knew what would chance to Windyhough before the dawn; and, for her part, she did not look before or after, but took the present as it came. And her instinct was Rupert's, as she shepherded Lady Royd into the hall—that here at last, thank God! was action after long sitting by the hearth.

Captain Goldstein, meanwhile, convinced that his entry into Windyhough was not to be bloodless, after all, had tried his strength once more against the gate of the courtyard, and, finding it solid, had cast about for some way of breaking through it. The moon was making greater headway now through the rifted snow-clouds, and he saw the pile of tree-trunks at which Simon Foster had been busy until Sir Jasper's messenger had disturbed him at the wood-chopping.

Like his troopers, Goldstein was wet and hungry and impatient, and his one thought was to rive the gate down, whatever strength opposed him on the far side of it. He gave a sharp order, and six of his men lifted a trunk of sycamore, and poised it for a while, and rammed the gate. The

first thrust strained the gate against the cross-bars, and broke back sharply on the men who held the ram, disordering them for a moment.

The master waited, his musket ready primed. "Simon," he said, "and you, Ben Shackleton, we're bidden to hold the house, but gad! we'll do a little in the courtyard first."

Goldstein's men came at the gate again, struck savagely, found by chance a weak spot in the wood. And this time they splintered a wide opening. They drew back a little, to get their breath, and through the opening Rupert saw faintly in the moonlight the half of a man's body. Simon Foster, watching him, saw a still, passionless light steal into his eyes as he lifted the musket to his shoulder and fired with brisk precision. There was a cry of anguish from without, a sudden, heavy fall, and afterwards the guttural voice of Captain Goldstein, bidding his troopers clear the dead away and ram the gate again.

Rupert, for his part, was reloading. And he was tasting that exquisite, tragic glee known only to those who kill their first man in righteous battle. He was drinking from a well old as man's history; and its waters, while they swept compunction and all else away, gave him a strange zest for this world's adventures.

The troopers were desperate now. They rammed the splintered gate with a fury that broke the cross-bars; and Lady Royd, watching it all from the porch, saw a troop of savages, dusky in the moonlight—let loose from hell, so it seemed to her disordered fancy—swarm through the opening. She glanced at Rupert, saw him take careful aim again; and this time there was no cry from the fallen, for he dropped dead in his paces, so suddenly that the man behind tripped over him.

Simon Foster, who had preached the gospel of steadiness so constantly to the young master, aimed wildly at Goldstein, and missed him by a foot; but Shackleton, slow and sure by temperament, picked out a hulking fellow for his mark and hit him through the thigh.

"He tells his lie varry well, and sticks to it," laughed Simon Foster. "I was out i' that Rising myself, master, as you know, and if there were any bonnie doings, I never chanced on them."

"Nat is not wise. Let him be," said the master, with a chivalrous regard that was cradled deep in the superstitions of the moor.

The men without were battering uselessly at the great, nail-studded door. It had been built in times when callers were apt to come knocking on no peaceful errand; and it was secure against the battering-ram that had splintered the weaker courtyard gate. For all that, Rupert bade Simon and Ben Shackleton help him to up-end the heavy settle that stood along the wall. They buttressed the door with it, and were safe on this side of the house from any rough-and-ready method of attack.

Then Rupert, precise in his regard for detail, led them to the kitchens. The women were huddled over a roaring fire of logs—the fruits of Simon's industry not long ago—but Rupert did not heed them. The mullioned windows of the house were stout and narrow, and the only inlet, now the main door was safe, was by this kitchen entrance. The door was not wide enough to admit more than one man at a time, and its timbers could be trusted to resist attack until warning had been given to the garrison.

"Martha," said the master, choosing by instinct the one reliable wench among these chatterboxes, "your post is at the door here. You will warn us if there is trouble on this side."

"Oh, aye," she answered cheerfully. "I've clouted a man's lugs before to-day, and can do it again, I reckon." And she picked up her milking-stool, which was lying under the sink in readiness for the morrow's milking, set it down by the door, and seated herself with a deliberation that in itself suggested confidence.

Then the master went upstairs, with a light step, and stationed himself at the window, wider and more perilous than

any loophole, which overlooked the main door. It was the post of greatest hazard, given him by his father in that make-believe of defence which had preceded Sir Jasper's riding-out.

Rupert glanced down at the six muskets, the powder flask, the little heap of bullets that lay along the window-sill. "We thought them nursery-toys, Simon?" he said, with his whimsical, quick smile. "We even took the glass out from the window, pretending that we must be ready for the sharp attack."

"Drill pays," growled Simon. "Aye, keep hard at it enough, and drill pays."

"Yes, faith pays—it is drill, as I told you."

"Faith can bide. We're here i' the stark murk of it, master, and we'll say our prayers to-morrow—if it happens we're alive."

Rupert took up the muskets, one by one, saw to the priming of them. "You'll say your prayers to-night, Simon, by getting to your post," he said dryly. "Give Ben Shackleton the loophole on the west side. That gives us three sides guarded."

The two men went heavy-footed to their posts; and Shackleton turned to Simon Foster when they were out of earshot. "Young master's fair uplifted," he said. "He's not fey—that's all I hope."

"He's not fey," said Foster, blunt and full of common sense. "He's been a dreamer, and he's wakened; and we might do worse, Ben, than waken just as bright as he's done."

The master stood at his post, and felt the rebound from his own high spirits. He looked out at the blurred moonlight, the scattered flakes of snow, that hid the over-watching hills from him. The old self-doubt returned. He was pledged to keep the house secure—he who had been left behind because he was not trained to join the Rising. And he had little skill, except for dreams of high endeavour.

He lifted his head suddenly. From the courtyard below he heard the hum of guttural voices. Goldstein and his men were still gathered about the main doorway, hungry, wet to the skin, irresolute as to the best plan of action.

Rupert was no dreamer now. He could see nothing in the yard, through the thick snow and the moon-haze; but he took up a musket and fired at random, and picked up a second gun, and a third, and snapped the trigger; and from below there came a yelp of pain, a running of men's feet. And Rupert was his own man again, forgetting dreams, remembering only that the siege was here in earnest.

Through the smoke and the reek of gunpowder Nance Demaine came into the room.

"Where is my post?" she asked, standing trim and soldierly at Rupert's side.

Again she was met by the glance that looked through and beyond her, as if she stood between Rupert and some settled purpose. It seemed so short a while since she had sat at the spinet, had seen his eyes hungry with her, as if she were all his world; and now he scarcely heeded her. The riddle was so easy for a man to guess, so hard for a woman; and Nance, soldier-bred as she was, was piqued by the master's grave, single-minded outlook on the task in hand.

"Your post, Nance?" he echoed. "With mother, away from any chance of bullets."

"Did I shoot so badly, then—those days we practised up the fields?"

"No; but this is men's work, Nance."

"You have a garrison of three." Some wayward humour, some wish to hurt him, clouded all her usual kindliness. He was strong and did not need her; and she missed something pleasant that had threaded the weariness of these last days. "There's Simon, steady enough, but old. There is Ben Shackleton. And there is—youself, Rupert, very young to musketry. Are you wise to refuse your last recruit?"

The taunt found its mark. This daughter of Squire

Roger's had an odd power to touch the depths in him, whether for pain or keen, unreasoning delight. A moment since he had tasted happiness, had had no thought save one—that he was master here, fighting an enemy of flesh and blood at last. And now the old unrest crept in, the vague self-distrust that had clouded earlier days.

"We're few, and have no skill," he said, with an irony that was stubborn and weary both; "but I was bred, Nance, to put women in the background at these times."

She looked at him, as he stood in the cloudy moonlight filtering through the window. She knew this tone of his so well—knew that her hold on him was not weakened, after all. "Oh, you were bred to that superstition?" she said lightly. "As if women were ever in the background, Rupert! Why, our business in life is to dance in front of you—always a little in front of you, lest you capture us. Men, so Lady Royd says, are merry until—until—they have us safe in hand."

She dropped him a curtsey; and, before he found an answer, she was gone. And the master turned to the casement, hoping for the sound of a footfall without, the chance of another quick, haphazard shot. The wind had dropped to a little, whining breeze; but there was no other sound about this house that stood for the Stuart against odds. The snow was thickening. Rupert watched the flakes settle on the window-sill, ever a little faster, till a three-inch ridge was raised. And the old trouble returned. This had been his life here—the silence, the dumb abnegations, slow and cold in falling, that had built a wall between himself and happiness. And suddenly he brushed his hand sharply across the sill, scattering the snow. It was his protest against the buried yesterdays. Then he took up the three muskets he had fired, and one by one reloaded them. And after that he waited.

An hour later Simon Foster, stiff already from standing at the south window, made pretence that he must go the round of the house, lest younger men were not steady at their posts,

As he hobbled down the corridor that led to the north side, he saw Nance Demaine, sitting ghostlike at the window. And he crossed himself, because the habits of fore-elders are apt to cling to a man, however dim may be the faith of his later years.

Nance turned. "Ah! you, Simon?"

"Why, it's ye, Miss Nance? God forgive me, I thought you a boggart, come to warn us the old house was tumbling round our ears."

"Not yet, Simon," she said quietly. "I heard the master say one side was unguarded—and I knew where the muskets were stored—"

"But, Miss Nance, it's no playing at shooting, this. It may varry weel be a longer siege than you reckon for, and we're few; and it means sitting and waiting—waiting and sitting—till ye're sick for a wink o' sleep. Nay, nay! You dunnot know what strength it needs."

"I nursed a sick child once—not long ago. For three days and nights, Simon, I had no sleep."

The other was silent. All the countryside knew that story now—knew how Squire Roger's daughter had gone on some casual errand of mercy to a cottage on the Demaine lands, had found a feckless mother nursing a child far gone in fever, had stayed on and fought for its life with skill and hard determination. Yet Nance spoke of it now without thought of any courage she had shown; she was eager only to prove that she had a right to take her place among the men in guarding Windyhough.

Simon Foster looked at the girl's figure, the orderly line of muskets. She seemed workmanlike; and he approved her with a sudden, vigorous nod.

"The light's dim, Miss Nance," he growled, turning to hobble down the corridor, "but I reckon ye can aim."

It was so the long night began. The wind had ceased altogether. From out of doors there was no sound, of man or beast. The snow fell in thicker flakes, and, working

silently as those concerned with burials do, it laid a shroud about the courtyard, about the many gables of the house, about the firs and leafless sycamores that guarded Windy-hough from the high moors.

On the north side of the house, where the stables and the huddled mass of farm-buildings stood, Goldstein's men were preparing to find comfort for the night as best they could. From time to time there was a sound of voices or of shuffling footsteps, deadened by the snow; for the rest, a dismaying stillness lay about the house.

To Rupert, to Nance, guarding the north window, to Simon Foster, this silence of attack seemed heavier, more unbearable, than the do-nothing time that had preceded it. There had been the brief battle-fury in the courtyard, the zest of getting ready for the siege; and now there was only silence and the falling snow.

And out of doors Goldstein was no less impatient. He did not know that he was faced by a garrison so slender; for there is a strength about a house that has shown one bold front to attack, and afterwards gives no hint of the numbers hidden by its walls. Already two were dead, and two badly wounded, from among his company of one-and-twenty; and the rest were hungry, body-sore, and in evil temper. It was no time to force an entry. Better wait till daylight, get his men out of gunshot, and find food for them somewhere in the well-stocked farm-steadings.

They got round to the mistals on the west side of the house—moving close along the walls, afraid of every window that might hide a musket—and found Sir Jasper's well-tended cattle mooing softly to each other as they rattled their stall-chains. The warm, lush smell of the byres suggested milk to Goldstein, and, since stronger drink seemed out of reach, he welcomed any liquor that might take the sharpest edge of hunger from his men. He bade them milk the cows; and into the midst of this tragic happening that had come to

Windyhough there intruded a frank, diverting comedy, as the way of life is. Not one of them had milked a cow before, or guessed that Martha had been busy with her pail already; but each thought it a simple matter, needing no more than a man's touch on the udders. They found a milking-stool abandoned long ago by Martha because one leg was unstable, and one by one they tried their luck. The first who tried was kicked clean off the stool; the next man made a beginning so foolish and unhandy that the roan cow looked back at him in simple wonderment; and Goldstein, a better officer than his men understood, welcomed the laughter and uproar that greeted every misguided effort to fill the milking-pail. They had not laughed once since Derby, these men who were getting out of hand.

By and by the sport palled on them; and Goldstein, faced once again by their hunger and unrest, found all his senses curiously alert. From the laithe, next door to the byres, he heard the bleating of sheep in-driven yesterday from the high lands when the weather-wise were sure that snow was coming.

"There's food yonder, lads," he said sharply. "Drink can wait."

He opened the laithe door, stood back a while from the steam that greeted him—the oily heat of sheep close packed together. The moonlight and the snow filtered in together through the big, open doors as he ran forward, caught a ewe by the neck, and dragged her out. And they dispatched her quickly; for butchery came easy to their hands.

A little while after, as Rupert stood at his post by the window overlooking the main door—waiting for something to happen, as of old—he heard a slow, heavy footfall down the corridor. A blurred figure of a man stood in the doorway—for the moon's light was dim and snowy—and the master could only guess from the square, massive bulk who was this night visitor.

"They've lit a fire on the west side o' the house, master," came Shackleton's big voice. "What it means I couldn't tell

ye, but I saw the red o' it go kitty-kelpy fair across the snow."

Rupert followed him, glad already of the relief from sentry-work. Across the west window—emptied of its glass, like all the others, in readiness for action—little, pulsing shafts of crimson were playing through the snow-flakes. They heard men's voices, confused and jarring; and the red glow deepened, though they could see nothing of what was in the doing.

"We couldn't expect 'em, like, to light their fire within eye-shot," said Shackleton, with his unalterable quiet; "it would mean within gun-shot, as we've taught 'em. But I own I'd like to know just what sort o' devilry they're planning. They might varry weel be firing the house over our heads."

"No," said the master. "There are only stone walls on this side, Ben—five foot thick——"

"Ay, true. But they're not lads, to light a fire just for the sake o' seeing it blaze."

Outside, close under shelter of the house-wall, Goldstein's men had carried straw from the laithe where it was stored, had borrowed wood from the pile of timber left by Simon Foster at the courtyard gate, and were roasting their sheep as speedily as might be. And one adventurous spirit, searching the outhouses with a patience born of thirst, had found an unbroached ale-barrel. The return to good cheer loosened the men's tongues; and Goldstein was content to let them have their way until this better mood of theirs had ripened.

Within doors, Simon Foster had heard the master and Shackleton talking at the west window, had joined them, had listened till, from the babel of many voices, he heard what was in the doing.

"They're cooking their supper," he said. "I should know the way of it; for we went stark and wet through the '15, and cooked many a fat sheep, we did, just like these unchancy wastrels."

Into their midst, none knowing how he had drifted there, came Nat the shepherd, pipe in hand—a figure so old, so

palsied, that stronger men were moved by a pity deep as human courage and human suffering.

"Eh, now, I mind th' '15!" he cackled. "I rode out wi' Sir Jasper—he was a lad i' those days, and me a mettlesome man of fifty—and there were bonnie doings. It was all about some business o' setting King Jamie on his throne—and there were bonnie doings. The gentry riding in, and the gentry riding out—and the bonnie ladies' een bo-peeping at them as they went; and all the brave, open road ahead of us. We shall see no such times again, I warrant."

His head drooped suddenly. He fumbled for his tinder-box, because in his enthusiasm for days gone by he had let his pipe go out. He was a figure pitiful beyond belief—the last, blown autumn leaf, it seemed, clinging to the wind-blown tree of Stuart loyalty. And the master, in spite of the hazard out of doors, halted for a word of compassion.

"You did well, Nat," he said gently. "Tell us how the '15 went."

Nat was silent for a while. Across his dotage, across the memories that were food and drink to him, he returned to present-day affairs. He looked closely at the master, and nodded sagely.

"You're varry like your father, Maister Rupert. It seems a pity, like, you should be left here, to die like a ratten in a trap, when you might have been crying Tally-Ho along the Lunnon road."

The master winced. "They've not trapped us yet," he said quietly. "Get down to the inglenook, Nat, and smoke your pipe."

"Hark!" said Shackleton, his ear turned to the window. They're getting merry out yonder. Begom! they must have found liquor somewhere, to go singing out o' doors on a stark night like this."

A full-throated chorus was sounding now across the snow and the dancing red of the fire. The words were German, but the lilt of them was not to be mistaken.

"I wish I'd known they were coming," said Simon Foster ruefully. "There was a barrel of ale, master, left i' the shippon because I was too lazy to get it indoors yesterday. And they've broached it, they have; and it's good liquor going down furrin throats. The waste o' decent stuff!"

Rupert listened to the uproar out of doors. He had a quick imagination, and he was picturing an attack by drunken soldiery. These men of Goldstein's, he had gathered, were not lambs when sober. He thought of Nance, of his mother—thought of the virile, tender love that men of his Faith give their women—and the soul of him caught fire.

"Shackleton," he said sharply, "keep your post. Simon, get to yours. And, by the God who made me, I'll shoot you if you sleep to-night!"

He did not see Nance, nor think of her, as he went to his own station overlooking the main door. But Nance heard his tread, and glanced up, and found the night emptier because he did not know that she was near. For men and women see life from opposite sides of the same hill, and always will until hereafter they find themselves standing on the same free, windy summit.

He went to his post, and the long night settled down. And nothing happened, as of old. From sheer need of occupation, he fell to watching the snow fall thick and thicker out of doors—tried to count the flakes—and found the dumb, unceasing crowd of them enticing him to sleep. And then he sought a better remedy. He remembered the man he had hit through the opening of the courtyard gate—the others who had fallen to his musket; and he found the odd zest, the call of future peril, which spring from action. And to Rupert the call came with a peculiar sharpness; for he had been accounted slight, a scholar, and he was here in the thick of the siege perilous, with a deed or two standing already to his credit.

He was used from of old to sleeplessness, and as the night wore on his spirits rose to a surprising gaiety and sense of

well-being. His garrison was small; but he was master of his own house, at long last, and he had powder and ball on the window-sill in front of him. Whether he lived or died mattered little; but it was of prime importance that he kept this house of Windyhough to the last edge of his strength.

Out of doors, Captain Goldstein had given up all thoughts of prosecuting the siege until the dawn. He had detached six men from the ale-barrel to play sentry round the house, and had got the rest into shelter of the outhouses a half-hour later. They were bone-tired, all of them; they were well fed and full of ale; and the beds they made for themselves, of hay and straw, seemed soft as eider-down. Only Goldstein kept awake. He was as weary as any of them; but he had a single purpose, as Rupert had. The Prince was in the house here; dead or alive, he stood for thirty thousand pounds; and Goldstein kept himself awake by picturing the life he would enjoy, out yonder in the Fatherland, when he had claimed his share of the reward. He would squander a thousand of the thirty among his men—more or less, according to their temper—and would afterwards retire from service. For Goldstein, it would seem, did not share the Catholic belief that, till he dies, no man is privileged to retire from soldiery.

He kept awake; and by and by he could not rest under shelter of the byre that kept him weather-tight. He went out into the snowy moonlight, intent on seeing that his sentries were leaving no way open for the Prince to escape; and he forgot that there were windows looking out at him.

Rupert was standing at his post meanwhile, finding his high dreams useful now that the call to arms had come. He was serving for faith's sake, and for loyalty's; and service of that sort is apt to breed an odd content.

Across his sense of well-being a gunshot sounded—quick, and loud, and urgent, in this house of silence. He took up a musket, and peered through the snow-storm out of doors, expecting an assault. And again nothing happened, for a

little while. And then he heard a woman's step along the corridor, and Nance's voice, low and piteous.

"Rupert, where are you? I—I need you."

It was then Rupert learned afresh, with a vivid pain that seemed unbearable, how deep his love had gone during the past, silent years. She was in trouble, and needed him. He ran to her side, but could not outstrip the fears that crowded round him. There was the gunshot—and she was hurt; Nance, whom he had longed to keep from the least touch of harm, was hurt.

He put his arms about her. His eyes had grown used long since to the dim moonlight of the room, and they sought with feverish concern for traces of her wound.

"Where are you hurt, Nance?" he asked.

And "Here," she said, with a wan little smile—"here, right through my heart, Rupert. I—I have killed a man, I think, just now."

So then, through the confusion of his thoughts, he remembered that the gun-shot had sounded from within doors, and his heart grew lighter. "Why, then, there's one less of the enemy. You should be proud, my dear."

"Proud?" Her voice was still and hushed. "You were right when you said that this was man's work. I was watching at the north window—and the time seemed long in passing—and then I saw a man's thick-set body coming through the snow. And I—I forgot I was a woman, and took aim, and he fell, Rupert, so suddenly, with his arms thrown up, and lay there in the snow."

"One less," said the master, with a return to dogged cheerfulness. "We must get to our posts again."

Nance looked at him. Now that he knew her safe, he was again the soldier, forgetting the way of his heart and thinking only of the need for action. And her pride took fire, as she went back to her window, resolute to show him that she could be soldierly as he. For a while she dared not look out, re-

remembering what lay yonder; and then she chided herself for cowardice, and peeped through the moonlight.

The huddled bulk of a man that had lain prone in the snow was moving now—slowly, and on hands and knees—and was creeping out of range. And once again Nance knew herself a woman; for she was glad, with a joy instant and vehement, that she had a wounded man only on her conscience.

Goldstein, when the shot hit him at close range, had thought the end had come. He was wearied out by long riding over broken roads, by need of sleep; and the flare of the gunshot, the sudden hell-fire in his left thigh, had knocked his hardness to bits. But by and by, when he found leisure to pick his courage up, and knew that his wound went only deep through the fleshy part of his thigh, he made his way back to the stables, and roused one of his sleeping troopers; and, between them, they staunched the bleeding, and dressed the wound with odds and ends torn from the linings of their coats. And then Goldstein lay back on the straw and slept like a little child, and dreamed that he was home again in Hanover, in the days before he sought advancement in a foreign country.

At Will Underwood's house, meanwhile, the laggard gentry of Lancashire were sitting over their wine, and were cursing this snowfall that would not let them hunt to-morrow. And they were troubled, all of them; for they knew that better men were facing hardship on the London road, while they, from faults of sloth or caution, were sheltered by house-walls. They were men, after all, under the infirmities that hindered them; and ease, for its own sake, never yet appealed for long to hearts built for weather and adventure. They needed hard exercise, to blunt the edge of conscience; and they were fretful, ready to pick quarrels among themselves, because they knew that the morrow must be spent in idleness.

"We can always drink, gentlemen," said Underwood, pushing the bottle round. "That is one consolation."

"Likely to be our only one," snapped his neighbour, "if this cursed snow stays on the ground. And we can drink half the night, Underwood—but not all the day as well. You can have too much of a pastime."

"What are they doing London way, I wonder?" put in a smooth-faced youngster, gibing at himself and all of them. "They'll have bonnie roads to travel."

Underwood remembered a day, not long ago, when he had met Nance Demaine on the moor, recalled the look in her face as she gave him her kerchief and bade him use it as a flag of truce "when her men returned from the crowning." He got to his feet and reached across the table with clenched fist. "How dare you!" he said savagely. "We're all wearing the white feather, and you twit us with it, you young fool."

They drew back from him for a moment. His pain and fury were so evident, his easy-going temper so completely broken, that they thought him drunk, when in reality he was vastly sober—so sobered that he saw himself a creature pitiful and time-serving.

And the youngster, taking fire in turn, said that he would be called fool by no man without asking satisfaction; and swords would have been out had not Underwood's neighbour, a jolly, red-faced squire who liked to drink his wine in peace, taken the situation at a canter.

"For shame, Underwood!" he said, laying a sharp hand on his shoulder. "It would be no duel—it would be another slaughter of the innocents. To fight a boy like that—"

"Not very innocent, by your leave," broke in the youngster, with such palpable affront, such pride in his budding vices, that the old squire laughed outrageously.

"By gad! not very innocent!" he echoed, with another rolling laugh. "See the cockrel standing up to crow—all red about the gills, gentlemen. Let's fill our glasses and drink to his growing comb."

So it ended in frank laughter as they rose and drowned

the quarrel in a roaring toast. But Underwood, though he joined them, carried no good look. He was still thinking of Nance Demaine, of the white badge she had offered him. And an uneasy silence settled on them all.

"I heard a queer tale to-day, Will," said the red-faced squire presently, by way of lifting the talk into easier channels. "Old Luke Fawether met me on the road. He was coming home from market on that fat, piebald horse of his, and he pulled up. He'd ridden wide of Windyhough, it seemed, and swore that he heard gunshots through the snow—rattle after rattle, he said, as if half the moorside were letting off their guns."

"Oh, Luke!" laughed Underwood, rousing himself from his evil mood. "We know his market-days. He hears and sees queer things at home-coming—carries the bottle in his head, as the saying goes."

"Aye, but he seemed his own man to-day. The horse wasn't guiding him for once. His wife had been at him, maybe. He said they were not firing fowling-pieces, but something 'lustier in the bellows,' and I could make neither head nor tail of it. Who at Windyhough would be playing Guy Fawkes' foolery?"

"Rupert, likely," growled Underwood, some old jealousy aroused. "He was all for joining this precious Rising, till he found they had no use for dreamers. He was left to play nursery games with the women, and grew tired of it, and rummaged through the house till he found the muskets stored there."

"That's all very well, Underwood; but the lad would not go firing into the snow just for the frolic of it."

"Wouldn't he? I know Rupert. He could dream a whole regiment of enemies into the courtyard there if his mind were set that way, and go on firing at the ghosts."

"Well, he's past my understanding," laughed the squire. "Perhaps you're right."

"Oh, I can see him," Underwood went on, old antipathy

gaining on him. "He's ambitious. He would like to be the martyred Charles, and the Prince, and every cursed Stuart of them all. It's laughable to think how much our scholar dares—in fancy."

A low growl went round the table, and Underwood knew that he had gone too far.

"There'll be a duel in earnest soon," sputtered the red-faced squire who loved his ease. "You were never one of us, Will Underwood—and you think we're birds of a feather because we stayed at home with you; but I tell you plainly, I'll listen to no slur on a Stuart."

"Oh, I spoke hastily."

"You did—and you'll recant!"

Underwood, tired of himself and all things, gathered something of his old, easy manner. He filled his glass afresh and lifted it, and passed it with finished bravado over the jug in front of him. "To the King across the water, gentlemen!" he said smoothly.

One of the company had gone to the window, and turned now from looking out on the snow that never ceased. "All this does not help us much," he grumbled. "We can talk and talk, and drink pretty-boy toasts till we're under the table; but what of to-morrow? There'll be nothing doing out of doors."

"Wait," said Will Underwood. "When the snow's tired of falling there'll be frost; and the wild duck—say, to-morrow night—will be coming over Priest's Tarn, up above Windyhough."

"Gad! that is a happy notion, Will!" assented the old squire. "It's years since I had a shot at duck in the moonlight—and rare sport it is. Come, we've drunk to the Stuart, and to every lady we could call to mind. Let's fill afresh, and drink to the wild duck flying high."

Will was glad when the night's revelry ended and he found himself alone in the dining-hall. He had drunk level with his friends, and the wine had left him untouched. He had

diced with them, sung hunting-songs, and no spark of gaiety had reached him. For, day by day since he lost Nance once for all, he had been learning how deep his love had gone. Looking back to-night, as he sat at the littered table, with its empty bottles and its wine-stains, he could not understand how he had come to be absent from the Loyal Meet. The meaner side of him was hidden away. He was a man carrying a love bigger than himself—a love that would last him till he died; and he had not known as much until these days of loss and misery came.

At Windyhough the night wore slowly on. The besiegers, since Goldstein crept into shelter, spent and disabled, were less disposed than ever to risk attack before the daylight gave them clearer knowledge of this house that seemed to have a musket behind every window. The besieged listened to the silence—the silence of expectancy, which grows so deep and burdensome that a man can almost hear it. From time to time Rupert went the round of the corridor to see that his garrison was wakeful, and about the middle of the night he found Ben Shackleton nodding at his post, and gripped him by the shoulder.

"What's to do?" growled the farmer, shaking his big bulk like a dog whistled out of the water. "I was dreaming, master, and as nigh heaven as a man ever gets i' this life. I'd have swopped farming and wife and all for one more blessed hour of it."

Rupert laughed. He was learning much of human to-and-froing during these last days, and his first hot contempt of this sleeping sentry yielded to a broader sympathy. "What was your dream, Ben?" he asked.

"Nay, naught so much—only that I went to Lancashire Market and had a pig to sell. She wasn't worth what I was asking, not by th' half. And t'other chap he wrangled, and I wrangled; then, blamed if the fool didn't gi'e me what I asked, and we were just wetting our whistles on th' bargain when ye wakened me. It was a terrible good dream, master."

"Well, stay awake to remember it, Ben. These folk outside are too quiet for my liking."

Ben's face was impassive as ever, but his glance measured Rupert from heel to crown. He saw a slim-bodied man, whose face was lit with a keen and happy fire; he saw, too, that the anxiety which had dulled even Lady Royd's eyes—the toast of the county still, though the eyes were middle-aged—had only strengthened the light of authority and strength which played about his face. Ben Shackleton was slow to awake from his dream of pig-selling, but he was aware of some settled gladness—gladness that Sir Jasper had an heir at last.

"Aye," he said, shaking himself afresh. "It's the honest dog that barks—the biting sort lie quiet. Well, then? What's afoot, maister? I'm here to take my orders, I reckon, as Blacksmith Dan said when parson asked him if he'd have Mary o' Ghyll to be his wedded wife."

The man's lazy tongue, his steadfastness, proved long ago, brought an odd peace to Rupert. There were snow and a bitter wind outside, and an enemy that only by convention could be named civilised; but within there was a little garrison whose members, on the great, main issues, were not divided.

"Yes. You are here to obey orders," said the other sharply. "Keep awake at your post, Ben."

Shackleton saluted gravely. "I'll do it for ye, master, though I had a busyish day before I rade hither-till, getting ewes down from the high lands—and sleep is sticking round me fair like a bramble-thicket."

"Well, you've to win through the thicket, Ben," said the master, and passed on.

He crossed to the north window, saw Nance standing there, her trim head lifted to the moonlight as she peered over the window-sill; and for a moment he forgot that they were in the thick of the siege perilous.

"My dear," he said, with the tenderest simplicity,

"you'd best get to bed. You have done enough for one night."

She did not turn her head, and her voice was cold. "Have you done enough, Rupert?"

"Oh, I'm used to lack of sleep, and you are not."

She thought of the wakeful nights that had been torture to her since Will Underwood returned. First love, built of the stuff she had given him, dies hard; for it is the weak things that find easy death-beds, because their grip on this life and hereafter is languid and of slight account.

"I can handle a musket," she said, turning with sharp defiance; "and our defence is—is not strong."

In the silence, across the dull moonlight of the corridor, they measured each other with a long glance. And Nance, in this mood of hers, was passionately at war with him. Until to-day he had been her bond-slave, gay when she willed it, foolish and out of heart when she flouted him. And now her reign was ended. Rupert did not know it yet; but Nance, with the intuition that seems to do women little service, was aware that she had lost for the time being a cavalier and found instead a master.

"You can handle a musket," he said dryly. "Good-night, Nance—and remember to keep your head low above the sill. The men outside can aim straight, too."

He went back to his post at the window overlooking the main door. And he began to think of Nance, of the brown, shapely head that had been magic to him—the head that was in danger of a bullet from one of Goldstein's men. Yesterday he would have gone to her side, to ease the fierce pain for her safety; his feet were willing, and he wondered that instead he stood obstinately at his post, intent on musketry and the welfare of his house.

Nance waited for his return. She had had him at call, until peril came and the attack in front. She was sure that he would come back, anxious as of old lest the world should use her ill. But he did not come; and she felt oddly desolate,

because he was so resolute and far away from her. Then she, too, turned to the moonlit window and to soldiery.

And the night crept on to dawn. From the fowl-yard at the rear of the house a cock began to crow half-heartedly. Nance, from her window, and the master of the house from his, looked out on a grey whirl of snow, reddened by the fingers of a frosty dawn.

And nothing happened, as the way had been these days at Windyhough.



CHAPTER XVI

THE NEED OF SLEEP

GOLDSTEIN, when he awoke the next morning to find himself laid on the stable straw with a dull ache in his left thigh, remembered the business that had brought him here, and tried to rise. He found himself sick and useless, and, getting to his feet by sheer hardihood, fell back again with a black mist about his eyes. Little by little he began to accept the situation as it stood, and he waited till his head was fairly clear again. He did not propose, so long as he had breath, to abandon his project of securing the blood-money that would secure him a life of ease in the Fatherland; and his troopers, when he gave his commands for the day with brisk precision, liked him better, seeing his pluck, than they had done since the beginning of this ill-starred errand. He reminded them, moreover, of their slain, lying here and there about the courtyard; and revenge is a fire that kindles men's courage and hard obstinacy.

A little while later, as Rupert peered through the dawn-red snow of the courtyard, he heard a gruff voice from below. It was the sergeant who was Goldstein's deputy.

"I want to come within gunshot of your window," he said.

"Every man to his taste," laughed Rupert, glad of any respite from his vigil. "If you need lead, I can entertain you."

"Under truce."

"There can be no truce. I hold my house for the King, and mean to keep it."

"But listen. Give us the Pretender—we know as well as you do that he's hiding here—and the rest of you can pass out in safety."

"The Prince is here you think? Why, then, we guard him, sir—what else is possible?"

"You'll not give five minutes' truce? Captain Goldstein is wounded—"

"I'm devilish glad to hear it," said Rupert, with the gaiety that would not be denied."

"He sends me to talk over this little matter of the siege."

"Then step out into the open—under truce—and let me see your face."

Some quality of honour in Rupert's voice reached the sergeant. As he put it to himself, he knew the man for a fool who kept his word. The snow had all but ceased for a while, and in the keen dawnlight Goldstein's man looked up and saw Rupert's grave, clean-cut face at the window overhead.

"Your garrison is weak. We know it," said the sergeant.

"You lie. Our garrison is strong," Rupert answered bluntly.

"How strong?" put in the other, trying clumsily to catch him unawares.

"Force your way in and learn."

"But surely we can drive a bargain? There's a price on the Pretender's head—a trifle of thirty thousand pounds—and you can share it with us, if you will."

A sudden loathing came to Rupert as he listened to the man's thick, guttural persuasiveness. These hired soldiery of the enemy seemed to have only two views of a man—that he could be bullied or be bought.

"Go back to Captain Goldstein," he said. "Tell him that we're strong to stand a siege, and that—we are gentlemen of Lancashire who hold the house."

The sergeant glanced narrowly at the face above, and a suspicion took sudden hold of him. This man with the disdainful, easy air might be the Prince himself. He remembered the condition "dead or alive" attached to the blood-money, lifted his carbine, and fired point blank. The ball went wide

a little; but for a moment Rupert thought that he was hit, as the splintered masonry cut across his forehead. Then he stooped, picked up a musket, and took flying aim at the man below—without avail, as he thought. It would have cheered him to see the sergeant limp round the corner of the house toward the stables.

"Well?" asked Goldstein, cursing the pain that touched him as he moved quickly round. "Did the young rebel come to terms?"

"He came to the butt-end of a musket against his shoulder, and the bullet grazed my knee. I shall limp for days to come."

"Then limp, you fool! What is a grazed knee with the Pretender indoors yonder—"

"I've seen the Pretender," said the other, getting out his pipe and filling it. "The young rebel, as you call him—the man who pretends to be Sir Jasper's son—is Charlie Stuart. Face, and big, careless air, and belief that truce means truce in wartime—he's Charlie to the life, the Charlie who got as far as Derby and then, with all before him, went back again."

Goldstein, with nothing to do except nurse his wound, had been thinking much the same, had been reckoning up, too, the chances of this enterprise.

"They're weak in numbers," he said by and by.

"I'm not so sure. They're quick enough to fire from all four sides of the house."

"Yes, but the Stuart whelp would have led a sortie before this if they'd been strong."

"True," growled the sergeant, old at campaigning. "How long shall we give them, Captain?"

"A day or two. See to the sentries, keep out of fire, and we'll see what the waiting-time will do for them. It's a devil's game, waiting for action that never comes—we learned that, Randolph, in the old Flanders days."

"Aye, we learned fear," said the sergeant, harking back to some lonely enterprises that he had shared with Goldstein.

Within-doors Rupert kept his post. The brief excitement of his skirmish with the sergeant was gone. His fancy, always active, was racing now. He pictured, with a minuteness painful in its vividness, the shrift his women-folk would meet at the hands of the enemy without. Men who could not honour a truce of their own asking differed little from the brutes. And he was almost single-handed here, the master of a garrison so small that it was laughable.

The snow, after an hour or so, began to fall again. And round about the house there was a silence that could be felt. Those who have played sentry, hoping constantly for the relief of action, know the stealthy, evil fears that creep into a man's mind, know the crude, imminent temptation that sleep offers them, know the persuasive devil at their elbow who asks them why they take this trouble for a cause lost already.

All that day there was silence and the falling snow. And all night there was silence, broken only by a little wind that sobbed about the house; and Goldstein and the sergeant, nursing their wounds in the stable, could have told Rupert every symptom of the malady from which he suffered. They had gone through it years ago.

Lady Royd, for her part, showed bright against the dull canvas of the siege. She discovered, in her own haphazard way, that years of communion with Sir Jasper had taught her courage when the pinch of danger came. She still kept her pampered spaniel under her arm; but, in between the sleep she snatched fitfully, she moved about the house as the mistress and great lady. She kept up the flagging spirits of the women-servants, saw that the men had food and wine to keep their strength alive. And, now and then, she stole into the room overlooking the main door, and stood watching her son—bone of her bone—keep steady at his post. And afterwards she would withdraw, a happiness like starshine going with her because the heir, despite her weak handling of his destiny, was after all a man.

The next day broke with keen frost and a red sun that

forced its way through the last cloudbanks of the snow. And the sergeant asked Goldstein for his orders.

"Let 'em wait," grinned Goldstein. "We know the game, Randolph, eh? Let 'em wait till nightfall. Change sentries every two hours. It's devilish cold, and we must humour our ill-licked cubs. And, Randolph——"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Remember, thirty thousand pounds are worth the waiting for."

The master of Windyhough still kept his post; but, as the day wore on, he knew that he was facing disastrous odds. Across his eyes sleep began to weave slim and filmy cobwebs. He brushed them savagely away; but a moment later the hidden enemy was once again at work. It was a warfare as stealthy as this fight between the garrison, sheltered by stout walls, and the besiegers, who could not gauge the strength of those within.

For his health's sake, the master went the round of the house, found Ben Shackleton frankly asleep at the west window, and Simon Foster nodding, half-befogged with weariness. He roused them—not gently—and the struggle to stir them into watchfulness cleared all the cobwebs from his eyes.

He went back to his post by way of the north window; and here again he found his sentry fast asleep. Nance was sitting on the chair that Lady Royd had brought her, earlier in the day. Her brown hair was loosened in a cloud, and her face was hidden in her two capable, small hands. She had been a sentry to him—no more, no less, since the fiercest of this siege commanded all his ruggedness and strength; but he had no wish to rouse her now.

The waning light showed him the bowed figure, the tiredness that had conquered her persistent courage. He drew nearer, touched her bowed head with some stifling war of passion against reverence. All the muddled way of his love for her—the love that had not dared, because he doubted his

own strength to claim her—was swept aside. At the heart of him—the big, eager heart that had found no room till now—he knew himself a man. With the strength of his manhood he needed her, here in the midst of the siege perilous, needed to tell her of his love.

He moved forward, checked himself, watched the figure that was bent by a vigil too burdensome and long-protracted. And the wildness left him. The faith that had grown with his growing—the faith that had shown signs, a little while ago, of wear and tear—laid a cool, persuasive hand on him. Through the storm and trouble of this love for Nance he saw that she was weak, and wearied-out, and needing sleep. And at such times to the stalwart men a little light, reflected, may be, from the Madonna's face, shows like a shrouded star about all suffering women.

Rupert was finding the big love, and the lasting, here in the silence that tested faith and courage more than any fury of attack and open peril. He went back to his window. And again sleep tried to spin her cobwebs round his eyes; but her blandishments were idle.

The snow, about three of the afternoon, ceased falling, and across the moors that guarded Windyhough a wild splendour lit the hills. The clouds were scattered, till the last of them trailed over Lone Man's Hill in smoky mist. The sun lay red and fiery on the western spurs, and from the east the young moon rose, her face clean-washed and radiant. Frost settled keen and hard about the land, and all the white emptiness of snow grew full of sparkling life, as if some fairy had gone sowing diamonds broadcast.

At Will Underwood's house, five miles away across the heath, the feckless men who had shirked the Rising, took heart again. The duck-shooting that Will had promised them had miscarried yesterday, because the snow declined to humour them; but there would be sport to-night. Civil war, arising suddenly, brings always strange medleys, and it seemed unbelievable that these gentry could be here, quietly discuss-

ing the prospects of their moonlight shooting, while the house that was nearest neighbour to Underwood was standing, unknown to them, a siege against long odds. For Windyhough lay isolated, high up the moors that were untravelled by chance wayfarers during this rough weather; it was circled by rolling hills that caught the crack of muskets, and played with the uproar, passing it on from spur to spur, until it reached the outer world as a dull, muffled sound that had no meaning to the sharpest ears.

Rupert did not ask aid, would have resented any. And, as the day wore on to seven o'clock—ticked out solemnly by the great clock in the hall—he was fighting, with surprising gaiety and patience, the battle against silence and the foe without. His eyes were not misty now with sleep. His mind was clear, unhurried, fixed on a single purpose; and, when now and then he made his round of the house, his body seemed light and supple in the going, as if he trod on air. He was possessed, indeed, by that dangerous, keen strength known to runners and night-riders as second wind.

One of Goldstein's sentries, patrolling the front of the house, chose this moment for a fool's display of confidence. The house was so silent, the strain on the endurance of the garrison so heavy, that he thought them all asleep within doors, and came out into the open to reconnoitre.

Rupert saw him creep, a dark splash against the frosty snow, and levelled his musket sharply. In this mood of clear vision and clear purpose, he could not have missed his aim; and the sentry dropped, as a bullock does when the pole-axe strikes his forehead.

And then there was a sound of hurried feet across the yard, and another sentry came to see what was in the doing. And a second musket-shot ran out.

"What is it, Rupert?" came a low, troubled voice from the doorway.

He turned and saw Nance standing there, roused by the shots, but still only half awake. Not again, perhaps, would

he taste the exquisite, unheeding joy, the sense of self-command, that held him now.

"There are two less, my dear," he said.

She had been dreaming of old days and new, during the vigil at the north window that had proved too long for her; and she spoke as a child does, half between sleep and waking.

"I thought you came to me, Rupert, and you held me close, because there was danger, and you told me you were proved at long last. I always trusted you to show them—how big a Stuart heart you had."

The master glanced at her. She was good to see, with the brown, disordered hair that clouded a face soft with sleep and tenderness. And yet he was impatient, as he touched her hand, led her back to her seat under the north window, watched her yield again to the sleep that would not be denied. Then he went to his post; and all the new-found passion in him, all his zest in life, were centred on the strip of snowy courtyard that lay about the great main door. He was captain of this enterprise, and till the siege was raised he asked no easier road of blandishment.

For the next hour there was quiet, except that Martha, the dairymaid, came upstairs with heavy tread; and, when the master went out to learn what was in the doing, he found her setting down a steaming dish on Simon Foster's knees.

"You were always one for your victuals," she was saying tenderly.

"Aye," assented Simon cheerily. "An empty sack never stands up, they say; and who am I to deny it? You've a knowledgeable way of handling a man, Martha."

"Well, you're all I have, Simon."

"And that willun't be much to boast of, if this plaguy quiet goes on much longer. I'm fair moiled wi' weariness, my lass."

Rupert saw the man, who should have learned riper wisdom by this time, bring down Martha's head to the level of

his own; and he went back to his window, filled with a deep, friendly merriment. And still he trod on air, not knowing how near he lay to the sleep that would not be denied.

And by and by, as he looked out in constant hope that another figure would come stealing into the moonlit open, he heard his mother's spaniel barking from the far side of the house. The dog had heard, though the master's duller ears could not, the voices raised in sharp discussion in the stable-yard. News had been brought to Goldstein that the house was resolute and wide-awake, if two dead men from among his lessening band were proof enough; and the pain of his wound roughened his impatience; and he gave certain orders that were to the liking of his troopers, chilled by harsh weather and inaction.

A little later Rupert heard a woman's step again along the corridor and the pampered crying of a dog. Lady Royd, all in her night gear, with a wrap thrown loosely over it, came into the moonlight of the room, carrying the spaniel under-arm.

"Rupert, my little dog is restless."

"Yes, mother? It's an old habit with him. You feed him in season and out. No wonder he has nightmares."

"You never liked him, I know," she complained.

He was gentle with her petulance. Her face was stained with weariness and fear; she needed him. On all hands he was needed these last days; and the strength of him went out, buoyantly, to each new call made on him.

"I must like him for your sake, mother," he answered lightly.

The spaniel slipped suddenly from Lady Royd's grasp, ran barking to the window, and jumped on to the sill. All seemed quiet without, but the dog barked furiously, and would not be quieted.

Then from the courtyard a musket cracked. The bullet missed the spaniel, went droning through the room, and

touched Lady Royd's cheek in passing. She did not heed, but ran and clutched her dog.

"My little man!" she murmured, with tender foolery. "You're not hurt? The wicked men, to shoot at a wee doggie—"

"He's not hurt," said Rupert sharply; "but you are, mother."

She touched her cheek, looked at the crimson on her finger. And she was the great lady once again. "Rupert, a wasp has stung me," she said, in her dainty, well-bred voice—"a rebel wasp. You will destroy the hive."

And the master laughed, seeing she was little hurt. This mother of his was a Royd among them, after all. She had not thought of danger as she snatched her spaniel from the window, had not winced when the bullet seared her cheek. In the quiet, royal way, she gave her quarrel into his hands and trusted him to take it up.

"What's agate, master?" asked Simon Foster, coming in to learn the meaning of the musket-shot.

"I can't tell you, Simon. All was quiet outside—"

"Not if the dog heard something," said the other shrewdly. "He's sharper ears than you or me."

He lifted his head cautiously above the sill and listened. There was silence absolute in the courtyard, and within doors only the tick-tack of the eight-day clock in the hall, the whimpering of the spaniel. Whatever Goldstein's project had been, it was delayed by the dog's unexpected challenge.

Simon scented danger on this side of the house, however, and would not get back to his post. And a half-hour later his patience was rewarded.

"I guess what they're at," he said, turning with a slow grin. "My lady—meaning no disrespect—you'd best keep your lie dog's tongue still, or he'll spoil our sport."

Lady Royd was learning obedience these days. "Are they your orders, Rupert?" she said submissively.

"Yes, mother, yes. Get back to your warm room. You'll take a chill out here."

She turned at the door, glanced at him with a whimsical, queer air of raillery. "You men are built after the one pattern. You need us women till there's something worth while in the doing, and then—why, then, my dear, you send us straight to bed, like naughty children."

"We keep you out of harm's way, mother. Good-night," said Rupert gravely. "What do you hear, Simon?" he asked the moment she was gone.

"Men creeping through the snow; I can hear their feet scrunching over the frozen crust; and they're dragging branches after them. I was a fool not to listen to the women-folk when they asked me to get in yond cartload of fuel I left just outside the gate."

The master understood at last. "They'll be firing the main door?"

"Just that. And there's straw in plenty, and the stack o' bracken we got in last autumn, and a barrel of tar left over from the spring. They've got it all ready to their hands, master."

"I'm glad of it," said Rupert, with the keen, unerring foresight bred of the vigil he had kept.

"Oh? And for why, if a plain body might ask?"

"Because another night of this would find us fast asleep, Simon. I have had to wake you once or twice already, and I've not slept since Tuesday."

"I can't rightly follow you," said Foster, whose wits jogged slowly.

"Let them fire the door. It's our one chance. We can keep awake, say, for two hours longer, and the fight will help us."

So then Simon, who thought himself old to warfare, yielded to a grudging admiration of this youngster who was fighting his first battle. "Who taught ye this?" he asked, with simple curiosity.

"The years behind," snapped Rupert.

They listened to the stealthy goings and comings out of doors. Between the house-wall and the line of fire from Rupert's window there was a clear five yards of sanctuary; and along this track of safety they could hear Goldstein's men scrunch to and fro, carrying fuel of all kinds to the sturdy main door that had barred their progress until now. And once they heard a gruff command from the sergeant who led this enterprise.

"Stir yourselves, fools!" The rough German tongue sounded muffled from below. "We'll catch 'em asleep; and there's thirty thousand pounds indoors, and wine, and comfort; stir yourselves, my lads!"

Rupert did not understand the language of these hired soldiers, but the rough edge of a man's voice carries meaning, whatever tongue he speaks.

"There's no time to waste, Simon. We must get all our muskets down into the hall."

He crossed the landing, told Ben Shackleton what was in the doing, and the three of them made speed with carrying the muskets down. The two older men borrowed something of the master's eagerness and fire, forgetting that they were half dead for lack of sleep—sleep, which is more vital to a man than food, or drink, or happiness.

"They'll fire the door, and come through the gap," said Rupert, as if he spoke of trifles. "I take this wall; you stand close against the other."

"I catch your drift, master," said Simon, with a slow grip of understanding. "We shall be i' the dark, and they'll be red-litten by a bonfire o' their own making. And they'll have one shot apiece to fire, but we'll have six. You frame not so varry ill, seeing how young you are."

The master, by the light of a solitary candle that stood in a sconce overhead, saw to the priming of his muskets, laid them in an orderly row along the floor, and watched his men while they did the like. And then he bent an ear toward the

main door. Its thickness, and the settle up-ended against it, let no sound come through, save now and then a dulled oath or quick command. And again there was a waiting-time, one of many that had come to Windyhough.

Rupert, sure that he would not be needed for a while, ran up the stairs and found Nance still sleeping like a child at her post, and roused her gently.

"Are you hurt?" she asked, scarce awake from a dream of onset and of fury that had pictured Rupert in the forefront of the battle.

And then he told her—quickly, because this was time stolen from his work downstairs—that she must get Lady Royd into the kitchen, must wait there with the women-servants till they knew how the night's battle went. If the house were taken, they were to escape by the kitchen door, find their way to the disused farmstead in the hollow, and hide there till Goldstein's men had ridden off.

"But there are only three of you," said Nance, alert once more. "You let me keep a window for you, Rupert—are you afraid I shall go to sleep again if I join your company downstairs?"

"I command here," he said briefly, "and you obey."

In the thickest tumult women have odd methods of their own. "Obey? I never liked the word. I come with you—where the gunshots are."

"No," said Rupert.

And, "Yes," she said, an open quarrel in her glance.

So then the master, by sheer, blundering honesty, found the right way with her. "Nance, you'll weaken me if you come down. Nothing that can happen to me—nothing—can hurt me as—as what would chance if Goldstein's brutes got through us."

In the hurry and suspense, Nance found leisure—long almost as eternity—to see Rupert as he was. This was his courage, this was his love for her—a love asking nothing, except to stand between herself and danger.

"My dear," she said, "I think I shall obey."

And the master, greatly daring, lifted her hand, and touched it with his lips. "God bless you, Nance!" he said, as if he toasted royalty.

He went down the stair, took his place at the wall, and stood nursing a musket in his hands.

"They're long in getting their durned fire alight," said Ben Shackleton, with a nonchalance bred of great excitement.

Simon Foster's unrest took another form of outlet. He crossed to the master's side of the hall, reached up and blew the candle out. "Best take no risks," he grumbled. "You were always a bit unpractical, master, though I say it to your face."

Two hours or so before, Will Underwood had led his company of good livers and poor loyalists across the frozen snow to the roomy stretch of water that was known as Priest's Tarn. It was a white and austere land they crossed—league after league of shrouded, rolling heath that stretched to the still, frozen skies. The moon, hard and clear-cut, seemed only to increase the savage desolation by interpreting its nakedness.

The company were not burdened by the awe and stillness of the night. They had dined well; there was prospect of good sport; the going underfoot was crisp and pleasant. It was only when they reached the Tarn, and Will Underwood looked down at the gables of Windyhough, snowy in the moonlight a quarter of a mile below, that some keenness of regret took hold of him. Nance was under the roof yonder; and he loved her with a passion that had been strengthened, cleansed of much dross, since she put shame on him; and yet he was forbidden to go down and ask how she was faring. Even his hardihood could not face a second time the contempt that had given him a kerchief, because he might need a flag of truce.

"Here's Will all in a dream, with his eyes on Windyhough,"

laughed the jolly, red-faced squire. "Well, well! We all know Nance Demaine is a bonnie lass."

Underwood turned sharply, too sick at heart to care how openly he showed his feelings. "We'll not discuss Miss Demaine, sir; our record is not clean enough."

The squire was ruffled by the taunt, because he, too, was uneasy touching this stay-at-home policy that once had seemed so prudent. "The man's in love," he said, with boisterous raillery. "Here's Lancashire packed thick with pretty women, and he thinks there's only one swan in the county. Will, you must let me laugh. To be young—and sick with love—it's a fine, silly business. And little Nance has frowned, has she, when we thought you the prime favourite?"

"If you want a duel," said Underwood suddenly, "you can have it. The moon's light is good enough."

"We have no swords."

"No, but we have our fowling-pieces—say, at twenty paces. The light is good enough, I tell you."

There were seven in the party, and five of them at least were not disposed to miss their duck-shooting because two of their number chose to pick a quarrel. And, somehow, by ridicule, persuasion, threats of interference, they staved off the duel. And Will Underwood turned his back on Windy-hough, regained a little of his old, easy self, and settled to the night's business.

They put on the linen coats they had brought with them, each laughing as he watched his neighbour struggle with sleeves too narrow to go easily over their thick wearing-gear, and took their stations round the Tarn. They stood there silently, and waited; and they were white against white snow, so that even the keen-eyed duck could see nothing in this waste of silence except the glinting gun-barrels.

They waited for it might be half an hour, till the cold began to nip them. The black waters of the Tarn showed in eerie contrast to the never-ending white that hemmed its bor-

ders. And then the wild-duck began to come, some flying low, some swinging high against the moon and starry sky. And one and all of the seven ghostly sportsmen forgot they were due with Prince Charles Edward on the road of honour; for there is a wild, absorbing glee about this moortop sport that cancels men's regrets and shame.

Will Underwood shot well to-night. He picked the highest birds, from sheer zest in his marksmanship; and he saw the feathers, time after time, fluff up against the moonlight, watched his bird come down with that quick, slanting drop which is the curve of beauty.

Then there was another waiting-time. It was easy to gather their birds, for they showed plain against the snow, and the green feathers of the drakes glanced in the moonlight with a strange, other-worldly sheen.

"A night worth living for, Will," said the red-faced squire, as he went again to his station.

The duck were long in coming, and while they waited two musket-shots rang out from the dingle that sheltered Windyhough below. The uproar was so loud on the still air, so unexpected, that the men forgot the need of silence, and drew together, and asked each other sharply what it meant.

"Rupert the cavalier aiming at the moon," snapped Underwood. "He always did. He will wake his lady mother's spaniel."

No other shot sounded from below, and they returned at last to their waiting for the duck to come over. But Will Underwood kept his eyes steadily on the house below, and wondered, with an unrest that gained strength every moment, if all were well with Nance. He was roused by a sharp call from the squire.

"Your bird, Will!"

Will glanced up by instinct, saw a drake winging big and high overhead, and brought him down. Then he looked across at Windyhough again, and saw a flicker of crimson shoot up against the leafless tree that guarded it. The flicker

grew to a ruddy, pulsing shaft of flame till the roof-snow took on a rose-colour.

Underwood, ruffler, stay-at-home, and man of prudence, felt thanksgiving stir about his heart. There was danger threatening Windyhough; and Nance was there, and his single thought was for her safety.

"Gentlemen," he said, with a quiet gravity, "the duck must wait. We're needed there at Windyhough."

CHAPTER XVII

THE PLEASANT FURY

AT Windyhough there was an end of watching. Sleep had been the one traitor within-doors, and Goldstein's men, by firing the main door, had killed their comrade in the garrison. Rupert, fingering one of his six muskets, was tasting the keenest happiness that had come to him as yet. Ben Shackleton, as he watched the timbers of the doorway flame and glow, forgot that he had a farm, a wife, and twenty head of cattle needing him. And Simon Foster, for his part, remembered the '15, the slow years afterwards, and knew that it was good to be alive at last.

They watched the fire eat at the woodwork, watched the shifting play of colour; and, apart from the roar of the flames, the cracking of strained timbers, there was silence on each side of the crumbling barricades. Then suddenly the whole middle of the door fell inward, and in the pulsing light outside Rupert saw a press of men.

And the battle at the main door here was guided with wise generalship, as it had been at the outer gate some days ago.

"Fire!" said the master sharply.

His own musket was the first to answer the command, then Shackleton's, and afterwards Simon Foster's. In the red light, and at such close quarters, they could not miss their aim, and three of Goldstein's company dropped headlong into the flaming gap, hindering those behind them.

"Fire!" said the master again, with quick precision.

And then the attacking company withdrew a while, after sending a hurried, useless volley through the hall. They had been prepared for a fight within-doors against a garrison of

unknown strength, but not for this welcome on the threshold.

The sergeant, hard-bitten and old to campaigning, was dismayed for a moment as he looked at his lessened company. When they came first to Windyhough this band of Goldstein's had numbered one-and-twenty. Now, at the end of two days, he could count only ten; the rest were either killed or laid aside beyond present hope of action. It was no pleasant beginning for an assault upon the darkness that lay inside the burning woodwork of the door.

Then he got himself in hand again. Whatever the unknown odds against them, their one chance was to go forward, now the door was down.

"We've tasted hell before," he growled. "Steady, you fools! You're not frightened of the dark."

He sprang forward, and at the moment the last timbers of the doorway fell and flamed on the threshold, lighting up the whole width of the hall. He saw Simon Foster standing by the wall and levelling his musket, and fired sharply and hit him through the ribs. And after that was Bedlam, confused and maniacal and full of oaths; but to Rupert the glamour of his life had dawned in earnest.

He fired into the incoming company, and so did Ben Shackleton; and then they retreated to the stairfoot, carrying a musket apiece.

There were eight left now of Goldstein's men, and they rushed in with such fury that they jostled one another, hindering their aim. Eight shots spat viciously at the garrison of two, and Shackleton's right arm was hit by a bullet that glanced wide from the masonry behind him. He clubbed his musket with the left hand and brought it down on the head of the man nearest to him, and then he was borne down by numbers.

Rupert, not for the first time in his life, was alone against long odds. But to-night he was master of his house, master of the clean, eager soul that had waited for this battle. From the kitchen, where he had bidden his women-folk take

shelter, he heard Lady Royd's spaniel yapping furiously; and he smiled, because old memories were stirred.

He went up five steps of the stairway, singled out the serjeant, because he was the bulkiest of the seven left, and fired point-blank at him. After that there was no leisure for any one of them to reload; it was simply Rupert on the narrow stairway, swinging his musket lightly, against six maddened troopers who could only come up one by one.

It was Nance who intervened disastrously. She did not know—how could she—that the master, at the end of a dismaying, harassed vigil, was stronger than the six who met him. They were dulled to the glory of assault, but he was gathering up the dreams of the long, unproven years, was fighting his first battle, was armoured by a faith more keen and vivid than this world's weaknesses could touch.

Nance, sick to know how it was faring with the master, weary of the yapping spaniel and the old housekeeper's complaint that she wished to die decently in her bed, out of eye-shot of rude men—Nance crept up the back stair, and took a musket from the ledge of the north window she had guarded. Then she went down again, crossed the passage that led to the main hall, halted a moment as she saw Rupert on the stair, the six men below—all lit by the unearthly, crimson flare of burning woodwork—and lifted her musket with trim precision.

She had lessened the odds by one; but Rupert, glancing down to see who had fired so unexpectedly, saw Nance standing at the rear of this battle which was his. And his weakness took him unawares. He had been dominant and gay, because he carried his life lightly; but now there was Nance's honour. One of the five left came up at him, and Rupert's aim was true with the butt-end of his musket; but he was not fighting now with a single purpose, and he knew it. And sleep, kept at bay through every minute of every hour that had struck since Goldstein's men came first, began to claim its toll.

He could not hold the stair, sleep whispered at his ear. And he rallied bravely, afraid for the first time because of Nance. If he should fail to keep the stair? A sharp, unreasoning anger seized him. Why was she here? Women were good to send men into battle, to bind their wounds up afterwards, but in the hot, keen thick of it they had no place. Do as he would, his glance kept seeking the little figure that stood on the edge of the fire-glow, and the men pressing up were quick to see the change in him.

With a last, hard effort he shut down all thought of Nance. The troopers he had stunned lay sprawling down the stair, hindering the men behind. For a moment there was respite, and in that moment sleep thickened round the master's eyelids. The confidence, the sense of treading air, borrowed at usury from his strength, were fast deserting him. He had victory full in sight on this narrow stair, and, like his Prince, he felt it slip past him out of reach, for no cause that seemed logical.

Nance did not guess the share she had had in this. She saw only that Rupert stooped suddenly, as if in mortal sickness, then squared his shoulders—saw that one of the men at the stairfoot was reloading his musket with deft haste, and shut her eyes. For she, too, was weak from lack of sleep.

Will Underwood, meanwhile, was running down the moor, the red-faced squire and the other sporting recusants behind him. There was no doubt now that Windyhough was in urgent peril. They could see the flaming doorway, could smell the scudding reek of smoke that came up-wind.

"You're up to the neck in love," protested the squire, trying to keep pace with Will. "There's naught else gives such wind to a man's feet."

A sharp noise of musketry answered him from below, and Will ran ever a little faster. The squire's gibe did not trouble him. The whole past life of him—the squalor of his youth, the sterile abnegation of the Sabbaths spent at Rig-

stones Chapel, the gradual change to ease and popularity among big-hearted gentry—passed by him like a fast-moving company of ghosts. And then another phantom stole, with faltering steps and shrouded head, across this vision he was borrowing from another world. He saw his cowardice, lean, shrivelled, stooping—the cowardice that had been born of ease and frank self-seeking. He had pledged faith that he would follow the Stuart when need asked; and he had broken troth, because he yearned to keep his house and lands, because he had planned to give a ball at Christmas that should set all Lancashire talking of its pomp.

God was very kind to-night to Wild Will. The run was short and swift to Windyhough, as time is reckoned; but during the scamper over broken ground he found that leisure of the soul which is cradled in eternity. He won free of his past. He knew only that the squire had spoken a true word in jest.

He was deep in love. All the ache and trouble of his need for Nance were wiped clean away. She was in danger, and he was running to her aid; and he understood, with a clean and happy sense of well-being, the way of his Catholic friends when they loved a woman. Until now it had been a riddle to him, the quality of this regard. He had seen them love as full-blooded men do—with storm and jealousy and passionate unrest, but always with a subtle reserve, a princely deference, shining dimly through it all. And to-night, his vision singularly clear, he knew that their faith was more than lip speech, knew that the Madonna had come once, and once for all, to show the path of chivalry.

If Rupert had found happiness during this siege that had tested his manhood, so, too, had Will Underwood. With a single purpose, with desire only to serve Nance, asking no thanks or recompense, he raced over the last strip of broken ground and through the courtyard gate.

“Be gad! they’ve been busy here!” growled the red-faced

squire, seeing the bodies lying black against the snow and hearing the wounded crying in their anguish. But Will did not see the littered yard, the white, keen moonlight that spared no ugly detail. His eyes were fixed on the burning threshold—Nance was behind it, and she needed him.

The fallen doorway, the blazing remnants of the settle, had set fire by now to the woodwork of the hall. Will ran through the heat and smoke of it, saw Rupert swaying dizzily half up the stair, and below him four Hessian troopers, one of whom was lifting a musket to his shoulder. He had his fowling-piece in hand, half-cocked by instinct when he left the duck-shooting for this scamper down the moor. He cocked it, and at the moment the trooper who was taking aim at Rupert turned sharply, hearing the din of feet behind, saw a press of men, white from head to foot, pouring through the doorway, and fired heedlessly at Underwood. And Will's fowling-piece barked at the same moment; at six paces the charge of shot was compact and solid as a bullet, but the wound it made was larger, and not clean at all.

The three troopers left faced round on the incoming company. They saw seven men, white in the linen coats they had not found thought or leisure to throw off, and sudden panic seized them. Through the stark waiting-time of their siege, with the moors and the sobbing winds to foster superstition, they had learned belief in ghosts, and thought they saw them now. They ran blindly for the doorway. Rupert leaped from the stair, and they were taken front and rear.

When all was done, Rupert steadied himself, stood straight and soldierly, scanned the faces of his rescuers, and knew them all for friends.

"My thanks, gentlemen," he said, with tired courtesy.
"You came in a good hour."

He leaned a hand on the Red Squire's shoulder, wiped a trickle of blood from some chance wound that had touched his forehead, glanced round at them with dim, unseeing eyes.

"Have I kept the house? Have I finished?"

"The house is in our keeping now. You've done well, my lad," said the red-faced squire, with gruff tenderness.

"Then I'll get to sleep, I think."

And he would have fallen, but the squire held him up and, putting two rough arms about him, carried him upstairs.

"A well-plucked one," he said, returning quickly. "And now, gentlemen, the house will be on fire, by your leave, if we don't turn our hands to the pump."

Nance, watching from the shadows, was bewildered by the speed and fury of it all—bewildered more by the business-like, quiet way in which these linen-coated gentry went in and out of hall, carrying buckets and quenching the last smouldering flames with water from the stable yard. This was war—war, with its horror, its gallantry, its comedy; but it was not the warfare she had pictured when she sang heroic ballads at the spinet.

And then the night's uproar and its madness passed by her. She thought only of the master who had all but died just now to save the house—to save her honour. She could not face the busy hall, the man sprawling on the stair, head downward, where Rupert's blow had left him. Instead, she went back along the corridor and up by the servants' stairway, and found Rupert lying in a dead sleep in his own chamber, a lighted candle at his elbow, just as the red-faced squire had left him.

"My dear," she said, knowing he could not hear, "my dear"—her voice broke in a deep, quiet laugh that had no meaning to her as yet—"they said you were the scholar. And I think they lied."

She lifted her head by and by, hearing the squire's voice below in the hall.

"Where's Will Underwood?" he was asking noisily. "We've got the fire under, and we can see each other's faces now we've lit the candles. Where, by the Mass, is Underwood?"

Nance shivered. Through her weariness, through the

panic of this sharp attack, she recalled the shame of her first love, recalled her meeting with Will Underwood on the high moors, when he had talked of loyalty as a thing of barter.

She stooped to touch Rupert as he slept. Here was a man, spent and weak; but here, proved through and through, was a cleanly gentleman who, against odds, had kept his obligations. Old affection stirred in her, and new pride in his conduct of the siege.

"Where's Underwood?" came the squire's voice again. "Is this some prank of his, to hide away?"

"With Nance Demaine, sir," answered some pert youngster of the company. "Where else should he be? He was never one to waste time."

"You've guessed the riddle, youngster." The squire's laugh was boisterous. "It's odd to think of Underwood lovesick as a lad in his teens—especially just now, with all this litter in the hall."

Outside the doorway Will Underwood was lying in the moonlight. He had been hit in the groin by Goldstein's trooper, just as he answered with a charge of shot at six paces; and because the hills had bred him, he needed to get out into the open, taking his sickness with him.

He lay in the snow and looked up at the sky. He had never seen a whiter moon, a clearer light, at time of mid-winter. Land and sky were glittering with frost, and overhead he saw the seven starry lamps of Charlie's Wain. He was in bitter anguish, and knew that his hurt was mortal; he had no regret for that, because he knew, too, that Windyhough and Nance were saved. His bitterness was of the soul. Strain as he would, he could not shut out the picture—clear as the frosty sky above him—of Nance's face when she met him on the moor—years ago, it seemed—and he thought he was his own ghost, come to warn her of his death.

He lived through that scene again in detail, heard Nance's voice sweep all his prudent self-esteem aside. And her scorn bit deeper now, because he knew at last the strength of his

fine regard for her. Passion was gone. Prudence was gone, because men near to death remember that they came naked into the world. He had lost the trickeries that had earned him the name of Wild Will, and was glad to let them go. He was aware only that he lay between here and hereafter, in pain of body and soul, and that he might take this last fence gladly, as on a hunting-morn, if he could wipe away the remembrance of one day gone by.

Many things grew clear to him as he lay and watched the moon. The wrath and pitiless hell-fire of Rigstones Chapel yielded to a wider outlook on the forgiveness of a Being greater than himself in charity. He found it easy to forgive his enemies, to forget his jealousy of Rupert, whom he had saved just now. But, warring against the peace he sought, and keeping the life quick in his tortured body, was remembrance of that day on the high moors. His work, good or ill, was done, and he longed to die, and could not.

Into the littered hall at Windyhough, while the squire paced up and down asking noisily for Will Underwood, old Nat the shepherd sauntered, pipe in hand. He was old, and a dreamer, and the gunshots and the fury had not disturbed him greatly.

Nat glanced round at the fallen men and the standing, at the doorway through whose blackened lintels the keen moonlight stole to drown the candle-flames. And he laughed, a gentle, pitying laugh. "It's naught so much to brag about," he said. "There were bonnier doings i' the '15 Rising. Men were men i' those days."

Nance wearied of it all as she stood by the master's bed and listened to the talk downstairs. The house seemed full of men, and insolent coupling of her name with Will Underwood's, and the sickly, pungent smell of blood and smoke. She was tired of gallantry and war, tired of her own weariness; and she went down the stair, stepping lightly over Rupert's enemy, and came among them into hall.

"Your servant, Miss Nance," said the red-faced squire,

not guessing what a figure of comedy he cut, bowing under the folds of a white linen coat.

"I thank you, gentlemen," said Nance unsteadily. "From my heart I thank you. You—you have done us service. And now, by your leave, I need to get out of doors. I—I have been in prison here."

They made a lane of honour for her. They had been laggards in the Prince's service; they were recusants, come at the last hour to prove themselves; but they felt, seeing Nance step down between them, her face stained with weariness and long vigil, that a royal lady had come into their midst.

Nance went through the charred doorway, and halted a moment as the pleasant frost-wind met her. The moonlight and the clean face of the sky gave her a sense of ease and liberty, after the cramped days indoors. The siege's uproar, its stealthy quiet, were lost in this big silence of the frosty spaces overhead.

From the silence, from the snowy courtyard at her feet, a groan brought her back sharply to realities. She looked down, and saw Will Underwood lying face upwards to the stars. He, too, was linen-sheeted, as the squire had been; but there was no touch of comedy in his apparel. It seemed to Nance that he was shrouded for his bier.

They looked into each other's eyes for a while, and some kindness in the girl's glance, some regret to see him lying helpless with the fire of torment in his eyes, fired his courage.

"You?" she said gently. "You came to save the house?"

"No, Nance; I came to save you. That was my only thought."

"They are asking for you indoors. I do not understand —you are wounded—"

"In your service—yes. They were right, after all—they always said I'd more luck than I deserved."

She was free now of the bewilderment of this night attack, the sharp battle in the hall, quick and confused in the doing. The moonlight showed her the face of a man in ob-

vious pain, a man fighting for every word that crossed his lips; and yet he was smiling, and the soul of him was gay.

"I'll bring help," she said, turning toward the house.

"No; you've brought help. Nance, I'll not keep you long. There was a day—a day when we met up the moor, and I was your liar, Nance—from heel to crown I was your liar—and God knows the shame you put on me."

Nance, scarce heeding what she did, took a kerchief, stained with gunpowder, from the pocket of the riding-coat she had worn, day in, day out, since the siege began.

"I keep my promise, Will."

Even yet, though Nance was kneeling in the snow beside him and he heard the pity in her voice, Will could not free himself from some remembrance of that bygone meeting. "As a flag of truce?" he asked sharply.

"As a badge of honour. You are free to wear it."

He reached out for her hand, and put it to his lips with the reverence learned since he came down from duck-shooting to find a mortal hurt. "As God sees me," he said, a pleasant note of triumph in his voice—"as God sees me, I die happy."

And then he turned on his side. And the pert youngster who had coupled Nance's name with Will's, coming out in search of the missing leader, saw the girl kneeling in the snow and heard her sobs. And he crept back into the hall, ashamed in some queer way.

"Why, lad, have you seen a ghost out yonder?" asked the red-faced squire.

"No, sir," the boy answered gravely. "It is as I said—Will is with Nance Demaine, and—and I think we'd better leave them to it."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RIDING OUT

SIR JASPER, out at Ben Shackleton's farm, had been no easy guest to entertain since he sought refuge there from the pursuit of Goldstein's men. He slept for twelve hours, after they had laid him on the lang-settle and stopped the bleeding from his wound; and then, for an hour, he had lain between sleep and waking; and, after that, he was keen to be up and doing.

Shackleton's wife, dismayed because her goodman had not returned long since from carrying his message to Windy-hough, was sharp of tongue, and lacking in deference a little, as the way of the sturdy farm-folk is when they are troubled.

"As you wish, Sir Jasper," she said tartly. "Just get up and stand on your two feet, and see how it feels, like."

He got stubbornly to his feet, and moved a pace or two across the floor; and then he grew weak and dizzy, and was glad to find his way again to the lang-settle.

"Ay, so!" said Shackleton's wife. "It's good for men-folk to learn, just time and time, how they can go weak as a little babby."

"My wife needs me yonder."

"Ay, and I need my goodman here. Exchange is no robbery, Sir Jasper."

"She is in danger," he snapped, with a sick man's petulance.

"Well, so's my man, I reckon—they've kept him yonder, or he'd have been home lang-syne."

Then weariness conquered Sir Jasper; and he slept again till that day passed, and the next night, and half through the

morning. It was his respite from remembrance of the retreat from Derby, from the wound that kept him out of action.

"You'll do nicely now," said Shackleton's wife, glancing round from ironing a shirt of her husband's. "You've got the look of your old self about you, Sir Jasper."

The wound itself was of less account than the bleeding that had followed it; and by nightfall he was waiting impatiently until the shepherd saddled his mare and brought her to the door.

The farm-wife looked him up and down, with the frank glance that had only friendliness and extreme solicitude behind it. "Eh, but you look sick and wambly," she said. "Can you sit a horse, Sir Jasper?"

"I am hale and well," he answered—fretfully, because he felt his weakness and because he was fearing for his wife.

He got to saddle, and the mare and he went slushing up and down the mile of bridle-track that separated them from home. He was no longer conscious of pain or weakness; his heart was on fire to see his wife again, to know her safe. At the turn of the hill, just beyond the gallows-tree that stood naked against the sky, he saw Windyhough lying below him, the moonlight keen on snowy chimney-stacks and gables.

"Thank God!" he said, seeing how peaceful the old house lay.

A little later he came to the splintered gateway, and his heart misgave him. The mare fidgeted and would not go forward; and, looking down, he saw a dead man lying in the moonlight—the trooper at whom Rupert had fired his maiden battle-shot.

He got from saddle, left the mare to her own devices, and ran across the courtyard. Here, too, were bodies lying in the snow. The main door was gone, save for a charred framework through which the moon showed him a disordered hall.

Without thought of his own safety here, with a single, sav-

age purpose to find his wife—dead or worse—he crossed the hall; and at the stairway foot he met the red-faced squire, coming down with a brisk tread surprising in a man of his bulk and goutiness.

"By gad! we're too busy with flesh and blood to care for ghosts," said the squire, halting suddenly. His laugh was boisterous, but it covered a superstition lively and afraid.

"A truce to nonsense," snapped Sir Jasper. "Where is Lady Royd?"

"Asleep—and her toy spaniel, too." The squire had come down and touched Sir Jasper to make sure that he was of this world. "I should poison that dog if it were mine, Royd. It yapped at every wounded man we carried in."

"My wife is asleep—and safe?" asked the other, as if he feared the answer.

"We're all safe—except poor Will Underwood; and all busy, thanks to that game pup of yours. For a scholar, he shaped well."

"Rupert kept the house?" Through all his trouble and unrest Sir Jasper tried to grasp the meaning of the charred doorway, the groans of wounded men above. "It did not seem so when I came indoors."

So then the Squire told him, all in clipped, hurried speech, the way of it. And Sir Jasper forgot his wife, forgot his wound, and all the misery that had dogged his steps since Derby. He had an heir at last. Rupert, the well-beloved, had proved himself.

"Where is he?" he asked huskily.

"Asleep, too, by your leave. No, we'll not wake him. He's had three days of gunpowder and wakefulness, Royd. Let him sleep the clock round."

The squire, seeing how weak Sir Jasper was, took him by the arm into the dining-chamber, filled him a measure of brandy, and pushed him gently into a chair.

"I came late to the wedding, Royd," he said dryly, "but I'm in command here, till you find your strength."

Sir Jasper, for the first time since Derby, was content. His wife was safe, and his heir was a man at last. And the red-faced squire, whom he had always liked, was no recusant, after all.

"You talked of carrying wounded men in?" he asked by and by. "I can hear them crying out for thirst."

"That's where they have us, Royd, these flea-bitten men of George's," said the squire, with another boisterous laugh. "They were crying like stuck pigs—out in the cold—and we *had* to take them in. Windyhough is a hospital, I tell you, owing to the queer Catholic training that weakens us. They'd not have done as much for us."

"That is their loss—and, as for training, I think Rupert has proved it fairly right."

"Well, yes. But I hate wounds, Royd, and all the sick-room messiness. It's an ill business, tending men you'd rather see lying snugly in their graves."

Sir Jasper laughed, not boisterously at all, but with the tranquil gaiety that comes of sadness. "There was a worse business, friend, at Derby. I went through it; and, I tell you, nothing matters very much—nothing will ever matter again, unless the Prince finds his battle up in Scotland."

And by and by they fell to talking of ways and means. Sir Jasper was pledged to rejoin the Prince, and would not break his word. Neither would he leave his son at Windyhough a second time, among the women and old men. And yet—there was his wife, who needed him.

The red-faced squire, blunt and full of cheery common sense, resolved his difficulties. "Cannot you trust us, Royd? There'll be six men of us—seven, counting Simon Foster, who is getting better of his hurt—and only wounded prisoners to guard."

"What if another company of roving blackguards rides this way?"

"Not likely. By your own showing, the hunt goes wide of this. Besides, we shall get a new doorway up. Rupert

held the house with two to help him—seven of us could do the like."

Sir Jasper began to pace restlessly up and down. "You forget," he said sharply, "it will be my wife you're guarding—my wife—and she means so much to me, old friend."

"We know, we know. D'ye think we'd let hurt come to her? Listen, Royd. When these jackanapes who groan in German are fit to look after themselves, we'll leave them to it, and take all your women with us to my house at Ravenscliff. And word shall go round that Lady Royd—the toast of the county to this day—needs gentlemen about her. She'll not lack friends, I tell you."

The squire's glance fell as it met Sir Jasper's. His conscience was uneasy still, and he fancied a rebuke that was far from Royd's thoughts. So had the Prince been the county's toast—until the Prince asked instant service.

"I can trust you," said Sir Jasper, with sudden decision. "Guard her—as God sees us, she is—is very dear to me."

Then, after a restless silence, Sir Jasper's doubts, bred of bodily weakness, ran into a new channel.

"There's yourself to think of in all this—your own wife, and your house. The Hanover men will not be gentle if we lose the battle up in Scotland."

"Royd," said the red-faced squire, not fearing now to meet his glance, "we've come badly out of this, we fools who stayed at home. There's been no flavour in our wine; we've been poor fox-hunters, not caring whether we were in at the death or no—you'll not grudge us our one chance to play the man?"

Sir Jasper understood at last that recusants can have their evil moments, can find worse cheer than he had met at Derby.

"I warn you, Ned, there's small chance of our winning now. For old friendship's sake, I'll not let you go blindly into this."

"What's the ballad Nance Demaine sings so nattily?
'Life's losing and land's losing, and what were they to gi'e?

Oh, it's all true, Royd. We have our chance at last—and, gad! we mean to take it."

"It bites deep, Ned," said the other, with grave concern.
"It bites deep, this wife losing and land losing."

"Not as deep as shame," snapped the red-faced squire.
"I'm a free man of my hands again. And now, by the look
of you, you'd best get to bed. Honest man to honest man,
Royd, you're dead-beat?"

"Yes—if the house is safe," said Sir Jasper, with unalterable simplicity.

"Oh, trust me, Royd! I'm in command here—and, I tell
you, all is safe."

He went upstairs, and into his wife's room. There was a candle burning on the table at her elbow, and he forgot his own need of sleep in watching hers. The strain of the past days was gone. She lay like a child at peace with God and man, and the peevish, day-time wrinkles were smoothed away; and she was dreaming, had her husband known it, of the days when she had come, as a bride, to Windyhough.

A gusty tenderness, a reverence beyond belief, came to Sir Jasper. He forgot all hardships Derby way. The simple heart of him was content with the day's journey, so long as it brought him this—his wife secure, with happiness asleep about her face.

He stooped to touch her, and the spaniel sleeping at her side stood up and barked at him, rousing the mistress.

"Be quiet!" she said sleepily. "I was dreaming—that
my lord came home again, forgiving all my foolishness."

The spaniel only barked the more. And Sir Jasper, who was by way of being rough just now with all intruders, big or little, pitched him out on to the landing.

His wife was awake now, and she looked at him with wide eyes of misery. "You have kept tryst, my dear. You promised—when you rode out—that, if you died, you would come to tell me of it. And I—God help me!—was dreaming that we were young again together."

"We're very young again together, Agnes," said Sir Jasper, with a quiet laugh. "Do I look so ghostly that you all mistake me for a wraith?"

She touched him, as the squire had done—gently at first, and then with gaining confidence. "You look—as I have never seen you, husband; you are as grey of face as Rupert, when his work was done and they carried him upstairs. Your wound—Jasper, it is not mortal?"

"It is healing fast. There, wife, you are only half awake, and I'm dishevelled. I had no time to put myself in order. I was too eager just—just to see my wife again."

And Lady Royd was wide awake now. Not only the husband, but the lover, had returned. "I shall have to take care of you, Jasper," she said, with the woman's need to be protective when she is happy. "You'll need nursing, and—"

"I need sleep," growled Sir Jasper—"just a few hours' sleep, Agnes, and—and forgetfulness of Derby."

"Ah, sleep! That has been our need, too. We—we none of us went out with you, Jasper—but we kept the house. And we learned what sleep means—more than food or drink, more than any gift that we can ask."

It is in the hurried, perilous moments that men come to understanding. Sir Jasper, by the little said and the much left unsaid, knew that his wife, according to her strength, had taken a brave part in this enterprise.

"You talk of what old campaigners know," he said.

And there was a little, pleasant silence; and after that Lady Royd looked into her husband's face.

"You are home again—to stay until your wound is healed?" she asked.

"No, my dear. I take the road to-morrow. The Prince needs me."

She turned her face to the wall. And temptation played like a windy night about Sir Jasper, taking him at the ebb of his strength, as all cowards do. He was more weak of

body than she guessed; he had given really of himself, and surely he had earned a little ease, a sitting by the hearth while he told his wife, this once again, what was in his heart for her.

And his wife turned suddenly. Her eyes were radiant with the faith that siege had taught her—siege, and the reek of gunpowder, and the way men carried themselves in the face of the bright comrade, danger.

"Go, Jasper—and good luck to your riding," she said quietly.

At two of the next afternoon Sir Jasper and Rupert got to saddle; and the father, knowing the way of his son's heart, rode on ahead down the long, sloping bridle-track, leaving him to say good-bye to Nance Demaine.

Nance had been used to courage, as she was used to wind on the hills; but all her world was slipping from her now. She had given her kerchief to Will Underwood, from pity for a love that was dead and hidden out of sight; she had gone through stress and turmoil; and at the end of all Rupert, her one friend here, was riding out with his eyes on the hills, though she stood at his stirrup and sought his glance.

"God speed, Rupert!" she said.

He stooped to kiss her hand, but his thoughts were far away. "It seemed all past praying for, Nance—and it has come."

"What has come?" she asked—peevishly, because she was tired and very lonely. "Fire, and sleeplessness, and the cries of wounded men—what else has come to Windyhough?"

"Not Stuart songs," he answered gravely. "Stuart deeds are coming my way, Nance, at long last."

"So you—are glad to go, Rupert?"

He looked down at her and for a moment he forgot the road ahead. He saw only Nance—Nance, whom he had loved from boyhood—Nance, with the wholesome, bonnie face that discerning men, who could see the soul behind it, named beautiful. All his keen young love for her was needing outlet

on the sudden. She was so near, so friendly; and about her was a clear, eager starshine, such as lovers see.

The siege, and killing of a man here and there, stepped in and conquered this old weakness that was hindering him. "Nance, my dear," he said, "I shall come back—when I'm your proven man."

It was so he went quietly out into the sunlight that had struggled free awhile of the grey, wintry clouds. And again Nance was chilled, as she had been when the Loyal Meet rode out—years ago, it seemed—without sound of drum or any show of pageantry. She had not learned even yet that men with a single purpose go about their business quietly, not heeding bugle-calls of this world's sounding.

She watched him go, old pity and old liking stirred. And she longed to call him back, but pride forbade her.

Simon Foster came grumbling through the charred courtyard gate. He had stood at the hilltop, watching the old master and the young go out along the track he was too infirm to follow; and there was a deep, abiding bitterness in his heart.

"They shouldn't have gi'en me a taste o' fight, Miss Nance," he said. "I call it fair shameful just to whet a body's appetite, and then give him naught solid to follow. Oh, I tell ye, it's ill work staying at home, tied up wi' rheumatiz."

Nance was glad of the respite from her own muddled thoughts, from the sense of loss that Rupert had left her as a parting gift. "It is time you settled down," she said, with a touch of the humour that was never far from her. "And you have Martha to make up for all you're losing."

"Ay, true," grumbled Simon, his eyes far away; "but Martha could have bided till I'd had my fill, like. She's patient—it's in the build of her—but, I never was."

"Patience?" said Nance. "It is in no woman's build, Simon. We have to learn it, while our men are enjoying the free weather."

Rupert had overtaken his father on the winding, downhill track, and they rode in silence together for a mile or so, each thinking of the other and of the work ahead. It was a pleasant, deep communion for them both; and the son remembered, for the last time, how Sir Jasper had lied to him in giving him the house of Windyhough to keep. From the soldiery learnt there, from the peril waiting for them ahead, Rupert had won the priceless gift, forgiveness—a herb troublesome and hard to find.

"You're silent, lad," said Sir Jasper, as they came to the stretch of level track that took them right-handed into the Langton road.

"I was thinking—that dreams come true, sir, as I said to Nance just now."

Clouds were hurrying up against the sun—yellow, evil clouds, packed thick with snow—and a bitter wind was rising. The going underfoot was vile. Their errand was to join an army in retreat, with likelihood that they would dine and breakfast on disaster. And yet—because God made them so—they found tranquillity. Sir Jasper had dreamed of this, since his first gladness that he had an heir, his first sorrow when he admitted to himself, grudgingly, that the boy was not as strong as he had wished. And Rupert, while his shoulders found their scholarly droop in reading old books at Windyhough, had shared the same dream—that one day, by a miracle, he might ride out with his father on the Stuart's business.

And they were here together. And nothing mattered, somehow, as the way of men is when their souls have taken the open, friendly road.

They rode hard in pursuit of the Prince's army, nursing their horses' strength as far as eagerness would let them; and, at long last, they overtook their friends on the windy summit of Shap Fell, where the Stuart army was bivouacked for the night.

Sir Jasper asked audience of the Prince, and found him

sitting in his tent, eating a stew of sheep's kidneys—the one luxury royalty could command at the moment. And the Prince rose, forgetting his quality, in frank welcome of this man who had shared the evil Derby days with him.

"I thought you dead, sir; and I'm very glad to see you—alive, but thinner than you were."

No detail ever escaped the Prince's eye, when he was concerned about the welfare of his friends; and the solicitude, the affection of this greeting atoned for many hardships.

"I was wounded, your Highness, or should have been with you long since."

"So much I knew. No other hindrance would have kept you," said the Prince, with flattering trust.

"I bring a volunteer with me."

"He must be staunch indeed! A volunteer to join us in these days of havoc? Has he been jilted by one of your Lancashire witches, that he's eager to trudge through this evil weather?"

"No. He has just won through a siege on your behalf—the siege of my own house—and could not rest till he had seen you."

The Prince had been in a black mood of despair not long ago. He was alone in his tent, with none to need him for the moment, none to know if he were sick at heart. Like all men, great or small, he was at once the victim and the captain of the temperament given him at birth; and none but the Stuarts knew how dearly they purchased—through lonely hours of misery, self-doubt, denial of all hope—the charm, the gay, unyielding courage that touched the dullest wayfarers with some fine hint of betterment.

Sir Jasper's coming had cleared the Prince's outlook. In the man's simplicity, in the obvious love he held for this unknown volunteer, the Stuart read a request unspoke.

"Present him," he said, with the smile that had tempted

men and women alike to follow him for love. "He'll forgive me if I finish this stew of kidneys? For I own I'm devilish hungry."

Through the toilsome ride from Windyhough to Shap, Rupert had talked of the Prince, and only of the Prince; and Sir Jasper went now to find his heir, proud—as simple men are—of the transparent diplomacy that had secured Rupert his heart's desire so promptly. He did not find him at once among the busy camp; and when they were admitted to the royal tent, his Highness had finished his meal, and was smoking the disreputable pipe that had been his friend throughout this weary, meaningless retreat.

"My son, your Highness," said Sir Jasper.

Rupert, coming out of the stark night outside, blinked as he met the flickering light of the rush-candles within the tent. Then his eyes cleared, and some trouble took him by the throat. He was young, and in the Presence; and his dreams had been greatly daring, sweeping up to the stars of Stuart loyalty.

"I commend you, sir," said the Prince, looking the lad through and through, as his way was, to learn what shape he had. "There are apt to be volunteers when a cause is gaining, but few when it's escaping to the hills."

The heart of a man, kept bridled for five-and-twenty years, knows no reticence when it meets at last the comrade of its long desire.

"Your Highness," said Rupert, with a simplicity larger than his father's, because less wayworn, "I begin to live. I asked to serve you, and—and the prayer is granted."

"You join us in retreat?" said the Prince, touched by the pity of this hero-worship.

"I join you either way. I've found—why, happiness, I think."

The Prince was a few months younger than himself; but he touched him now on the shoulder, as a father might. "Good luck to your honour lad!" he said. "Clean the

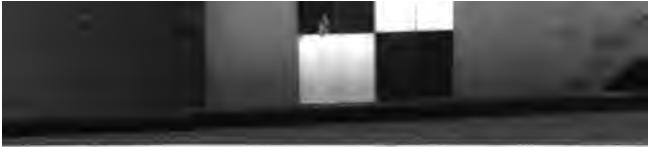
world's mud off from it whenever you find leisure, as you polish a sword-blade. That's the soldier's gospel."

The next day they were on the march again. The weather was not gentle on the top of Shap Fell, and the red sun, rising into a clear and frosty sky, showed them a lonely and a naked land—hills reaching out to farther hills, desolate, snow-white, and dumb. Not a bird called. The Highlanders, with their steady, swinging strides, the horsemen moving at a sober pace, were ringed about with silence. Before nightfall, however, they reached Clifton village, and here at last they found diversion from the day's austerity.

The Prince, with the greater part of his cavalry, had pushed forward to Penrith; but Lord Elcho, who, with Sir Jasper's horsemen, had charge of the rear, gave a sharp sigh of thanksgiving when a messenger brought news that the Duke of Cumberland, with his own regiment and Kingston's light horse, were close at his heels after ten hours' hard pursuit. Elcho was glad even of the long odds against him, knowing that his Highlanders were wearying for battle, and made his dispositions with a cheery sense that the Duke had done them a good turn in overtaking them.

Taking full advantage of the cover afforded by the country, Elcho placed his men behind the hedges and stone walls, and as the first of the dusk came down the Duke's soldiery delivered their attack. It was a sharp, bewildering skirmish, ended speedily by nightfall; but to Rupert, fighting in the open after the stifled days at Windyhough, it was easy to show a gallantry that roused the applause of men grown old and hard to combat. And ever he thought less of Nance, and more of this new comrade, danger, whose face was bright, alluring.

They left the Duke with his dead; and, because they were hopelessly outnumbered if the daylight found them still in possession of Clifton, they went through the black night to Penrith, bringing news to the Prince of their little victory. And after that it was forward to Carlisle.



CHAPTER XIX

THE FORLORN HOPE

It can be bitter cold in Carlisle, when the wind raves down from the Border country and the rain will not be quiet; but never had the grey town shown more cheerless than it did to the Prince's eyes when, six days before Christmas, he rode in with his retreating army. The brief, sudden warmth of the victory at Clifton was forgotten. They had travelled all night, over distressing roads, fetlock deep in mud. They were strained to breaking-point, after incessant marches, day after day seeing the footmen cover their twenty miles with bleeding feet. They were disillusioned, hopeless, sport for any man to laugh at whose faith went no farther than this world's limits.

For the Prince, when he got inside the Castle, and gave audience to Mr. Hamilton, the governor, there was worse trouble brewing. Hamilton, caring only for the Stuart's safety, was resolute to hold Carlisle against the pursuing Hanoverians, encamped at Hesket, within an easy day's march of the city. He pointed out, with a clear reasoning beyond dispute, that the Castle was strong to stand a siege, that the Duke of Cumberland would halt to capture it, knowing it the key of the Border country, that a small garrison could ensure the Stuart army a respite from pursuit until they joined their friends in Scotland.

"I decline, Mr. Hamilton," said the Prince sharply. "You can hold out—for how long?"

"For a week at least, your Highness—ten days, may be. They say the Duke has no artillery with him yet."

"But the end—the end will be the same, soon or late."

"A pleasant end, if it secures your safety. Oh, think,

your Highness! You've five thousand men with you, and we are less than a hundred, all told. I tell you, I have thought out all this. The garrison has thought it out, and—and we are bent on it."

"My men would not buy safety at the price. How could they? No, no, Mr. Hamilton. Your garrison shall take their chance in the open with us."

Yet that night the Prince could only sleep by snatches. Throughout this swift campaign, opposed to all the prudences of warfare, his thought that had been constantly for the welfare of his soldiery, so far as he could compass it. And Hamilton had planned a gallant chance of safety for them. Undoubtedly, the plan was good.

To and fro his thoughts went, and they gained clearness as the night went on. For himself, he had no care either way. He had left hope behind at Derby, for his part. His heart was not broken yet, but it was breaking; and, if he had found leisure during this wakeful night for one private, selfish prayer, it would have been that he might die at dawn, facing the Duke's motley army of pursuit. For the Prince was not himself only, fighting his battle against circumstance with a single hand; he was bone of the Stuart fathers who had gone before, and death had always seemed as good a friend as life, so long as it found him with straight shoulders and head up to the skies.

There was the garrison here, resolved to die with gallantry. There was his army, horsemen saddle-sore and footmen going with bleeding feet for Stuart love. And one or other must be sacrificed. It was no easy riddle for any man to solve—least of all for a Prince whose soul knew deeper sickness than usual men's, whose body was racked by long riding through wet roads. He had an aching tooth, moreover, that moved him to get up at last, and light his black clay pipe, and pace up and down the room allotted to him in the castle.

He was no figure to entice the ladies who had danced with

him, some months ago, at Holyrood. It was the man's business that claimed him now, and he fought out the battle of Stuart pity against the bigger, urgent need.

At dawn he went down, and met the Governor coming up the stair. "Your garrison can have their wish, Mr. Hamilton," he said quietly. "It seems the better of two evil ways."

"Can you spare twenty of your men, your Highness? Some few of us have fallen sick since you marched south, and we need strengthening."

And the Prince laughed, because pity and heart-sickness compelled it. "I can spare anything just now," he said, "even to the half of my kingdom—the kingdom that Lord Murray hopes to win for me in Scotland."

"There are better days coming—believe me——"

"To-day is enough for you and me, Mr. Hamilton. My faith, thank God, teaches me so much, in spite of a raging tooth."

He went out, and in the courtyard encountered a friend grown dear to him during a forward march and a retreat that had given men opportunities enough to prove each other. It was Colonel Towneley, whose name even before the Rising had stood for all that Catholic Lancashire had found likeable—Towneley, who had joined the southward march with the loyal company known as the Manchester Regiment; Towneley, who was resolute and ardent both, two qualities that do not always run together. "Mr. Hamilton is insistent to hold the Castle," said the Prince, with the sharpness that was always a sign of trouble on other folk's behalf.

"Yes, your Highness. I learned yesterday that he's of my own mind. If a hundred men can save five thousand, why, the issue's plain."

"He needs twenty volunteers to strengthen the garrison."

A sudden light came into Towneley's face—a light not to be feigned, or lit by any random spark of daring that dates no farther back than yesterday. "By your leave," he said,

quietly, "he needs nineteen only. I am privileged to be the first."

The Prince laid a hand on his shoulder. "Towneley, I cannot spare you! Let younger men step in. There's Lochiel, and you, and Sir Jasper Royd, men I've grown to love—I cannot spare one of you."

Towneley met the other's glance and smiled. "I had a dream last night," he said.

"But, friend, it is reality to-day."

"Let me be, your Highness. Perhaps dreams and reality are nearer than we think. I dreamed that I knelt with my head on the block, and heard the axe whistle—and then—I woke in Paradise."

"Towneley, you're overstrained with all this devilish retreat—"

"Your pardon, but I speak of what I know. I woke in Paradise, your Highness, and found leisure to think of my sins. It was a long thinking. But there was one comfort stayed by me—my Stuart loyalty. Look at it how I would, there had been no flaw in it. The dream"—again the lightening of the face—"the dream contents me."

A little later they went out into Carlisle street. Wet and chilly as the dawn was, both soldiery and townsfolk were astir; and the Prince and Towneley, who had talked together of things beyond this day's needs, faced the buzz and clatter of the town with momentary dismay.

The Prince was losing a friend, tried and dear; but he had lost more at Derby, and dogged hardihood returned to him. He looked at the way-worn men who faced him, eager to obey the Stuart whom they idolised, wherever he bade them go.

"We march north to-day, leaving the garrison here," he said, a straight, kingly figure of surprising charm—charm paid for in advance and royally. "There are twenty needed to volunteer—for certain death, my friends. I have no lies for you; and I tell you it is certain death."

"Nineteen, your Highness," corrected Towneley.

"Nineteen are needed. I forgot that Colonel Towneley—"

He got no farther for a while. Wherever a man of Lancashire stood, in among the crowd, a great cheer went up. And Towneley, because he was human, was glad that these folk, who knew his record, loved him quite so well.

What followed was all simple, human, soon over, as great happenings are apt to be. There was Carlisle street, with its gaping townsfolk, chattering foolishly and asking each other how these restless Highlanders would affect the profits of good shopkeepers; there was the Castle, set in a frame of murky rain, and, in front of it, Prince Charles Edward, asking for nineteen volunteers to follow Colonel Towneley's lead.

Even the townsfolk ceased balancing their ledgers. They saw only one face in this crowded street—the Prince's, as he stood divided between high purpose and sorrow for the toll of human sacrifice that is asked of all fine enterprises. They saw him as he was—no squire of dames, good at parlour tricks, no pretty fool for ballad-mongers, but a Christian gentleman, with sorrow in his eyes and a hard look of purpose round about his mouth and chin.

"Colonel Towneley," the Prince was saying gravely, "your gallantry has left me no choice in this. God knows how willingly I'd take your place." And then, because a full heart returns to old simplicities, his voice broke and he stretched out a hand. "Towneley," he went on, in lowered tones, "we're in the thick of trouble, you and I, and yours is the easier death, I think. I covet it—and Towneley, journeys end—you know the daft old proverb."

There was a moment's pause. The rain dripped ceaselessly. The wind struck sharp and cruel from the east, as it can strike nowhere surely as in Carlisle and grey Edinburgh. Yet no man heeded, for they knew that they had royalty among them here. And Colonel Towneley, for his part, began to sob—the tears coursing down his rugged,

weather-beaten face, not because he had to die within a week or two, but because he was compelled to say goodbye to one who, in conduct and in faith, seemed nearer to the stars than he.

"Towneley"—the Prince's voice was raised again, for he cared not who knew his old, deep-seated love of Lancashire—"Towneley, I was taught as a lad to like your country. Your men are loyal—your women ask it of you—but I warn volunteers again that they go to certain death."

"Just to another life, your Highness. I have no doubts; believe me, I have none. In one place or another—why, we shall see the Stuart crowned again. Sir, I thank God for this privilege; it goes far beyond my own deserts."

So then there was no more to be said. A great gentleman had spoken, content to take death's hand as he would take a comrade's; and when such speak, the lies and subterfuges of common life drift down the wind like thistledown. The townsfolk of Carlisle began to ask themselves if, after all, they had balanced up their ledgers rightly. These gentry, in the east wind and the rain, seemed to pass to and fro a coinage, not of metal but of the heart. And the coinage rang true.

Again there was a silence. And then the Prince asked gravely who would volunteer for death. There was a noisy press of claimants for the honour; but first among them was Rupert, putting bulkier men aside as he forced his way forward to the Prince.

"I, your Highness," he said quietly. "I was bred in Lancashire, like Colonel Towneley, and I claim second place."

"And why?" asked two or three behind him jealously.

Rupert turned, with a grave, disarming smile. Past weaknesses, past dreams of heroism, the slow, long siege of Windyhough, went by him as things remembered, but of little consequence. He felt master of himself, master of them all, and with a touch of pleasant irony he recalled past days.

"Because, gentlemen, I am God's fool, and I know not how to live, but I know how to die. That is the one trade I've learned."

There was no answer. There could be no answer. This man with the lean body and the purpose in his face was innocent of guile, and fearless, and strangely dominant. And then at last the Prince smiled—the fugitive, rare smile that few had captured since Derby and retreat.

"I believe you, sir," he said. "To know how to die—there is no better trade to learn."

Then Maurice pushed forward, eager for the forlorn hope, and moved, too, by the old, abiding instinct to stand by and protect his elder brother. And Sir Jasper, unswerving until now, was moved by sharp self-pity. He had been glad that Rupert should prove himself at heavy cost; glad that he himself could surrender the dearest thing he had to the Prince's need; but all his fatherhood came round him, like a mist of sorrow.

"One son is enough to give your Highness," he said, with direct and passionate appeal to the Prince. "I'm not too old to help garrison Carlisle, and my wife will need a young arm to protect her later on; let me take Maurice's place."

It was then the Prince found his full stature. In retreat, in sickness of heart, under temptation to deny his faith in God and man, the Stuart weighed Sir Jasper's needs, found heart to understand his mood, and smiled gravely. "There are so many claimants, sir, that I shall not permit more than one man from any house to share the privilege. As for Maurice, I shall have need of him at my side—and of you—I cannot spare you."

The tradesmen of Carlisle looked on and wondered. This was no shopkeeping. From the sleet and the tempest that had bred them, it was plain that these gentry had learned knighthood. Jack Bownas, the bow-legged tailor, who had held stoutly that kings and gentry were much like other men, save for the shape of their breeks, was bewildered by this

scene in Carlisle's ugly street. He was aware that men are not equals, after all, that some few—gently or lowly born—are framed to claim leadership by steadfastness of soul and outlook. "I'd like to tailor for yond Prince," he growled to his neighbour.

"So you've turned Charlie's man?" the other answered, dour and hard—a man who had yielded to north-country weather, instead of conquering it. "For me, he's a plain-looking chiel enough, as wet and muddied-o'er as you and me, Jack."

"He's a man, or somewhere near thereby, and I build few suits these days for men. I spend my days in cutting cloth for lile, thin-bodied folk like ye."

"I'm a good customer o' yours, and there are more tailors in Carlisle than one."

Jack Bownas, prudent by habit, was loath to lose custom. He pondered the matter for a moment. "Awa wi' ye," he said at last. "I've seen the Prince. You may gang ower to Willie Saunderson's, if you wull. He makes breeks for little-bodied men."

It was the tailor's one and only gift to the Stuart, this surrender of a customer; but, measured by his limitations, it was a handsome and a selfless tribute to the Cause. Born to another calling, he might, with no greater sacrifice, have set his head upon the block.

And through all this to-and-froing of the townsfolk, through the rain and the bitter wind and the evil luck, the forlorn hope—twenty of them—halted at the gateway of the Castle before going in.

Rupert turned round to grip his father's hand. "Good-bye, sir," he said gravely.

"Goodbye, my lad."

And that was all their farewell. No more was needed, for all the rough-and-ready training of their lives at Windy-hough had been a preparation for some such gallant death as this.

Colonel Towneley marshalled his volunteers in front of the gateway, and the bitter wind drove through them.

The Prince, with his shoulders square to the wind, took the salute of men soon to die. And then he drooped a little, as all his race did when they were thinking of the needs of lesser men. "Friends," he said, lifting his head buoyantly again, "there's no death—and by and by I shall be privileged to meet you."

Throughout this march to Derby, and back again to wet Carlisle, there had been no pageantry to tempt men's fancy. There were none now. A score of soldiers, drenched to the skin, went in at the Castle gateway, and the rain came down in grey, relentless sheets. Prince Charles Edward, as he moved slowly north at the head of his five thousand men, was still fighting the raging toothache that the hardships of the march had brought him. And toothache sounds a wild, disheartening pibroch of its own.

The night passed quietly in Carlisle, and the garrison was grave and businesslike, as men are when they stand in face of certain death and begin to reckon up their debts to God.

Colonel Towneley had persuaded Hamilton to get to bed and take his fill of sleep, and had assumed command; and about three of the morning, as he went his round, he came on Rupert, standing at his post. Towneley had the soldier's eye for detail, and he glanced shrewdly at the younger man.

"You were the first to volunteer with me?" he asked, tapping him lightly on the shoulder. "I remember your tired, hard-bitten face."

"It was my luck, sir—and I've had little until now."

"You should not be sentrying here. We've had no easy march to-day. You had earned a night's rest."

"I did not need it. I asked to take my place here."

Towneley looked him up and down, then tapped him lightly on the shoulder. "By gad! you've suffered, one time or another," he said unexpectedly. "You're young to have earned that steady voice. Good-night, my lad."

The next day was quiet in Carlisle, and the only news that came into the Castle was that the Duke of Cumberland still lay at Hesket, awaiting the implements of siege that were slow in reaching him; but the day after he brought his men into the city, and invested the town as closely as his lack of artillery allowed. It was a mistaken move on his part, as the shrewdest of his advisers pointed out to him; but the Duke had answered all wiser counsels with the blunt assurance that he had time to stay and butcher a few rebels here in Carlisle by way of whetting his appetite for the pleasant shambles to come afterwards in Scotland. And those few who were English among his following were aghast at the licence Cumberland allowed himself in speaking of enemies, misguided to their view, but brave and honourable men, content to face long odds.

And again there was quiet within the Castle. Two days passed, and still the Duke was waiting for the artillery that was forcing its way painfully through roads ankle-deep in mud.

Rupert, for his part, was entirely at home with the work asked of him. He was defending walls besieged, and nothing in the world was happening, as at Windyhough; but his task was easier here, because he had men to share the hardship with him, because he did not need, day by day, to fight single-handed against the sleep that had kept him company in Lancashire.

Hamilton, the Governor, and Colonel Towneley—seasoned men both—were astonished by the toughness and knowledge of defence shown by this lean-bodied lad whose energy seemed tireless. And then they learned from one of the Lancashire volunteers how he had kept Windyhough for the King, and they told each other that it was hard on the lad to have to face a second siege so soon.

"There's one who should ride far," said Towneley to the Governor once, after Rupert had got up from dining with them to take his post.

"Yes," said Hamilton, with tired mockery of the faith he held—"as far as the stars, Towneley—on a winged horse—like the Prince, God bless him! like Oliphant of Muirhouse—like all the dreamers who think this world well lost for loyalty."

"Well, we're fools of the same breed," put in the other dryly. "No need to laugh at your own regiment."

"Oh, I don't laugh! I'm tired—just tired, Towneley. I tell you, this business of holding Carlisle, while you others were facing the stark brunt of it, has made me peevish. I shall be an old woman if Cumberland's artillery does not reach him soon."

Towneley filled his glass afresh, held it up to the light, glanced across at the Governor with clear, unhurried comradeship. "I know, Hamilton—I know. I've felt the same—since Derby. The Prince has felt it. The Highlanders have felt it."

"You were in the open," growled Hamilton.

"In retreat, and asking battle all the while—battle that did not come. And we were saddle-sore and wet, with an east wind blowing through us. You were snug in Carlisle here, Hamilton. I tell you so."

And they came near to quarrel, as men do when their hearts grow cramped from lack of action. And then Towneley laughed, remembering his whole, round faith in this life and the next.

"We're grown men," he said, "and very near to death. We'd best not quarrel, like children in the nursery."

The next day the garrison looked out on a gentle fall of sleet that half hid the Duke's investing army. It was the day of Christmas, and those without might do as they liked; but the Governor and Colonel Towneley were aware that catholic souls must keep the feast of great thanksgiving.

They made their rounds with no less zeal, but with greater precision, maybe, knowing that the sword-hilt is fashioned like

the Cross. And about seven of the evening they sat down—Rupert with them, and all the gentry of the garrison who could be spared—at the well-spread supper-board.

They were simple at heart, these revellers who had known more fast than feast days lately. They had gone to Mass that morning with thoughts of the Madonna, who had changed the world's face, giving men a leal and happy reverence for their women-folk. They had remembered these women-folk with a pang of tenderness and longing knowing they would not see another Christmas dawn. But now they sat down to supper with appetites entirely of this world and a resolve to wear gay hearts on their sleeves.

It was an hour later that Hamilton, the Governor, rose and passed his wine across a great jug of water that stood in front of him. "To the King, gentlemen!" he said.

And, from the acclamation, it would have seemed they toasted one who was firmly on the throne, with gifts to offer loyalty. Instead, their King was an exile on French shores, and the only gift he had for them was this grace they had found to die selflessly and with serenity for the Stuart whom they served.

For a doomed garrison, they had supped well; and when Towneley got to his feet by and by and sang a Lancashire hunting-song, all in the broad, racy tongue of the good county, they called for another, and yet another. Discipline—of a drastic sort—was waiting for them. Meanwhile, they were resolved to take their ease.

And suddenly there was a knocking on the door, and then a rattling of the latch, and the sound of stumbling feet outside. And then the door opened, and into the middle of the uproar and the laughter came a figure so ludicrous, so dishevelled, that their merriment was roused afresh.

The man was dripping from head to foot—not with clean rain, but with muddy water that streaked his face, his hands, his clothes. And he stumbled foolishly as he moved to the table, and, without a by-your-leave, poured himself a measure

of wine and gulped it down. Then he tried to straighten himself, and looked round at the company.

"I carry dispatches, and—and I'm nearly done," he said.

There was no laughter now, for his weakness and his errand dwarfed all comedy. It was Rupert, remembering long years of hero-worship, who first saw through the dishevelment and mud that disguised this comer to the feast. He crossed to the messenger's side, and poured out another measure for him.

"You're Oliphant of Muirhouse," he said, "and—you steadied me in the old days at Windyhough."

Oliphant had the gift of remembering the few who were conspicuously leal, instead of the many whose weakness did not count in the strong game of life. "So you've found your way, as I promised you?" he said, with a sudden smile. "And it tastes sweet, Rupert? Gad! I remember my first taste of the Road."

And then Oliphant, feeling his strength ebb, crossed to the Governor and laid his dispatches on the table. He explained, in the briefest way, that he had ridden across country from Northumberland, changing horses by the way, had found Carlisle invested, had been compelled, lacking the password, to run a sentry through and afterwards to swim the moat.

With the singular clearness that, in sickness or in health, goes with men who carry a single purpose, he gave one dispatch into the Governor's hand. "That is for you, sir. This other must be carried forward to the Prince—must be carried instantly. Its contents may alter the movements of the whole army. The safety of his Highness is concerned."

He paused a moment, daunted by a weakness extreme and pitiful. "I had hoped to carry the message on myself, after an hour's sleep or two," he went on; "but I'm as you see me—there are times when a man can do no more."

The Governor was moved by Oliphant's childlike, unquestioning devotion. The man stood there, drenched and mud-died, after a ride that would have broken most folk's wish to

carry any message on. He had passed through besieging troops, and cooled his ardour in a moat whose waters were nipped by a north-east wind. And yet he seemed to ask forbearance, because he was not strong enough to ride out again at dawn on the Stuart's business.

"Be easy, Mr. Oliphant," said Hamilton. "I shall find you a hard-riding messenger."

Oliphant's mind was clear as ever for the detail that every man must watch whose heart is set on high adventure. He looked round the board, and the face that claimed his glance was Rupert's. Sharp and clear, old scenes at Windyhough recurred to him—the pretty, pampered mother, the weakling heir who longed to prove himself, the memories of his own unhappy boyhood that Rupert had stirred at every meeting.

"By your leave, Mr. Hamilton," he said, "I shall choose my own messenger."

The Governor nodded gravely. "It is your due, sir—much more than that is your due, if I could give it you."

"Sir Jasper Royd is my friend—and he will be glad to know that his son is trusted with dispatches."

Rupert took fire from the torch that this harassed messenger had carried into Carlisle Castle. Not long ago he had been a stay-at-home, fenced round with women and old men; and now, by some miracle, he was chosen to ride hard through open country.

Across his eagerness, across the free and windy gladness that had come to him, there struck a chillier air; and he stayed for a thought of comrades left in the rearguard of the action. It was the old, abiding instinct that ran with the simple Stuart loyalty.

"Mr. Oliphant," he said quietly, "we are waiting here for certain death. I choose to stay."

"You choose to stay?" echoed Oliphant.

"Because I volunteered—because you must take these dispatches north yourself. I tell you, sir, you must get free of Carlisle. It is death to stay."

Oliphant's failing strength rallied for a moment. He no longer saw the strained, eager face of this youngster who had given him hero-worship, who was pleading with him for his own safety. Instead, he saw a mountain-burn, high up on the braes of Glenmoriston, and a summer's day lang syne gone by, and one who walked with him. They had talked together, he and she, and she had been kind and winsome, but no more; and with that dream, high as the stars, yet vastly human, had ended his foolish quest for happiness.

He saw her now with the young eyes that had sought answering fire from hers and had not found response. He saw the whaups wheeling and crying over their heads, heard the tinkling hurry of the burn, the lilt of the breeze through the heather.

"Death?" he said turning at last to Rupert. "My lad, there are worse friends."

When they came to see him, after he had fallen into a chair, his arms thrown forward on the table, they found a gash across his ribs, of which he had not spoken. He had earned it during the encounter with the sentry, before he swam the moat.

"Hard-bitten!" muttered the Governor, with frank pleasure in the man. "Hard-bitten! The Prince is happy in his servants."

After they had carried the messenger to bed, the Governor drew Rupert apart. "See here, boy," he said sharply, "your sense of honour is devilish nice, but it needs roughening just now. You volunteered for death? Well, the order is countermanded—or, maybe, death's waiting for you close outside. Anyway, you go out to-night—at once."

"I would rather see my duty that way, sir, if I could."

"Oh, to the deuce with your scruples! You're young, and think it a fine, happy business to die for the Prince. It's a braver thing to live for him—through the stark murk of it, lad. Here are your dispatches."

The Governor, at the heart of him, was glad to feel that

this promising youngster, who had shown patience and gallantry in siege, should have his chance of a run for liberty. He hurried him out of the Castle and down to the edge of the moat. The night was thick with sleet and wind, friendly for the enterprise because it stifled sound.

"You can swim?" said the Governor.

"Passably, sir."

"Then slip in, and play about like a water-rat until you find your chance to land between the sentries. Make your way into the town and hire a horse at the first tavern. They do not know you in Carlisle."

"And you, Mr. Hamilton?" asked Rupert, with the old simplicity.

"I? I shall take care of my own troubles, lad. Meanwhile, you've enough of your own to keep you busy."

The passage of the moat was cold enough to keep Rupert intent on present business. The need afterwards to pick his way between the sentries, who were cursing northern weather, left him no time for thought of those he left behind in Carlisle. And then he had to keep a steady head, a quiet, impassive face, as he bargained with the host of the Three Angels Tavern touching the hire of a horse to carry him on an errand of gallantry to Gretna Green. He played his part well, this heir of Sir Jasper's, for the song of the open hazard was lilting at his ears.

He left the town behind him, and got out into the desolate, wild country that lay between Carlisle and the Border. Because he had no thought whether his horsemanship were good or bad, so long as it helped him along the track of a single purpose, he rode easily and well. After the quiet of Windy-hough, after the surprising journey to Carlisle, the second siege there, with nothing happening, there was a keen, unheeding freedom about this northward ride. He knew the Prince's route, had only to spur forward on the Annan road to overtake him, soon or late. He was wet to the skin, and

not strong of body; but his soul, like a steady, hidden lamp, warmed all this enterprise for him. His one trouble was that his borrowed nag was carrying a clinking shoe.

As he crossed the bridge at Gretna he heard two horses splashing through the sleety track in front, and wondered idly who were keeping him company on such an ill-found, lonely road. When he got to the forge, intent on having his horse re-shod, he saw the rough figure of the smith standing swart against the glow from the open smithy door, fronting a man good to look at and a woman whose face was shrouded by a blue-grey hood.

"It's lucky I was late with my work, and hammering half into the night," the smith was saying. "The fees are double, sir, after it strikes midnight," he added, with true Scots caution.

"Treble, if it pleases you. Marry us, blacksmith, and don't haggle. We've no time to waste."

When they turned, man and wife, to get to saddle again, they saw Rupert waiting, his arm slipped through his horse's bridle.

"Good luck to you both!" he said, with the easiness that sat well on him these days. "My need is to have a loose shoe set right—and I, too, have no time to waste."

The bride lifted her blue-grey hood and glanced at him, aware of some romance deeper than her own that sounded in the voice of this slim, weather-beaten stranger. "Dear, will you ask a favour of this gentleman?" she said, touching her bridegroom's arm. "He wishes us luck, and he has a loose horseshoe to give us. He comes in a good hour, I think."

Rupert stooped. The shoe came easily away into his hand, and the bride, as she took it from him, looked up at him as if she had known him long and found him trusty. "You carry the luck-giver's air," she said. "I have seen it once or twice, and—it cannot be mistaken."

"Likely," said Rupert, with a touch of the old bitterness. "I have found little of my own—till lately."

"Well, as for luck," put in the blacksmith dryly, "I fancy you've all three got more than the poor fools who came this way five days ago. Five thousand o' them, so it was said—five thousand faces that looked as if they were watching their own burial—and the pipes just sobbing like bairns left out i' the cold, and the Pretender with his bonnie face set as grim as a Lochaber blade—"

"The Prince—have you later news of him?" asked Rupert indifferently, as if he talked of the weather.

"Whisht, now! We have to call him the Pretender, whatever a body may think privately. Yes, I've news of him—news comes north and south to Gretna, for it's a busy road. They tell me he's in Glasgow, and minded to bide there for a good while."

The bridegroom laughed—the low, possessive laugh of pride that is the gift of newly-wedded males. "Princes come and go, but a good wife comes only once. Good-night to you, for we're pursued."

The bride gave Rupert a long, friendly look as she turned to get to saddle. "I thank you for your luck, sir," she said.

It was so they parted, not to meet again; but Rupert, as he waited restlessly until his horse was shod, was aware that this lady of the grey-blue hood had loosened his grim hold of life a little, because some note in her voice, some turn of the pretty head, had reminded him of Nance Demaine—Nance, half-forgotten, pushed into the background of this ride perilous that was to give him manhood at long last. And a sudden, foolish longing came to him to be at Windyhough again, seeing Nance come into a dull room, to make it, by some magic of her own, a place full of charm and melody.

"They say the Duke of Cumberland is staying to take Carlisle, sir," said the blacksmith, putting the finishing touches to his work.

"Yes. So they told me when I rode through to-day."

"Well, it gives these other chiels a chance, and I'm no saying I'm sorry."

"Nor I," said Rupert as he got to saddle, and pressed a crown-piece into the blacksmith's hand.

As he rode forward through the sleet, and was half-way to Annan in the Border country, a horseman, better mounted than himself, overtook him and drew rein sharply. There was a ragged sort of moonlight stealing through the darkness of the night, and he saw the face of a man, elderly and hard and in evil temper, peering at him through the gloom.

"I'm seeking my daughter, sir," said the stranger, without preamble of any kind. "She was married at Gretna just now—I was too late to stop that—but I trust to make her a widow before the night is out. Have they passed you on the road?"

"Was she wearing a grey-blue hood, sir?"

"How should I know? Have they passed you, I say?"

"No, but I watched them married at Gretna not long ago, and they rode out ahead of me."

"On which road?"

"They spoke"—even a white lie came unreadily to Rupert's tongue—"they spoke of turning righthanded towards Newcastle, I think."

So then the stranger turned his horse sharply round, swore roundly at his informant, and was gone without a good-night or a word of thanks. And Rupert laughed as he trotted forward. He had faced many things during his odd, disastrous five-and-twenty years—loneliness hard to bear, good-humoured liking that was half-contempt from the men who counted him a scholar, distrust and loathing of himself. But now he felt strength come into his right hand, as a sword-hilt does. His feet were set on the free, windy road. He had gone a little way to prove himself, and the zest of it was like rare wine, that warms the fancy but leaves both head and heart in a nice poise of sanity.

He thought of the lady in the grey-blue hood, and laughed

again. He knew now why he had lied to the pursuer. They were night-riders, like himself, she and her groom; they had chosen the honest open, with peril riding hard behind them. And, till he died, his sympathy would ever go out now to those who took the dangerous tracks.



CHAPTER XX

THE GLORY OF IT

THE Prince stayed in Glasgow with his army until the New Year was two days in. And this was fortunate for Rupert, because it enabled him to bring in his dispatches—after many a change of horses by the way—in time to share the pleasant victory of Falkirk later on.

And Falkirk Battle, like Prestonpans at the beginning of this wild campaign, showed the Prince quick in strategy beforehand, hot when the fight was dinning round his ears. By sheer speed of generalship he got his army to the rising ground which gave him the advantage, outwitting General Hawley, who led the Hanoverian army. And then news was brought—by Rupert, as it chanced—that Hawley could not get his cannon up within firing distance, because the bogland was so sodden that the wheels were axle-deep in mire. And so then the Prince, against Lord Murray's text-book warnings and advice, ordered a sharp attack. They had the advantage of the hill; but the Prince, knowing the temper of his Highlanders, chose to abandon that for the gain of instant action. He was justified. His men were like dogs kept too long upon the chain, savage for assault; and, when he led them down the hill, straight on to the astonished enemy—busy still with the foundered gun-carriages—the roar and speed of the attack swept all before it.

The fight was quick and bloody, till gloaming ended it. The odds were three to two against the Prince; yet when the day's business was accomplished, there were six hundred killed of Hawley's army, and many wounded asking for the succour which the Stuart gave by habit, and much artillery and ammunition captured.

It was in these days that Rupert found recompense for the way for once, had faced the opposing odds with the practical, quiet courage, the eager hope, that are seldom blended to a nicety in a man's soul.

And while they rested after the battle, news came in that General Hawley's army had been increased by three thousand troops sent by forced marches from Northumberland. Lord Murray's arithmetic again took panic; the Prince's zeal caught fire; and once more, in this bloodless battle of the council-chamber, it was the Scots prudence that won the day.

The Prince's army moved north, in retreat when advance was their master-card to play. And again the Highland pipers played sorrow round the hills, as if a mist came down. And Rupert found his strength come supple to him, like a well-tried sword, because in the years behind he, too, had known retreat.

They went north, and farther north, up into the beautiful, wild glens that now were harsh with winter, though the hill-bred men liked the naked pastures, the naked, comely trees, a little better than when the warmth of summer clothed them.

It was not a battle, but a rout. The Prince had had his years behind. Whenever a hazardous journey was planned, needing one resolute man to follow it alone, the choice fell on him. He had joined the honourable company of Night-Riders—those messengers who were seldom in the forefront of public applause, but whose service to the Cause was beyond all praise or recompense. There were some twenty of them, scattered up and down the two countries. Oliphant of Muirhouse, Rupert—each one of them was of the same build and habit—lean, untiring men who had earned their optimism by the discipline the slow-working mills of God had taught them—men who feared sloth, self-pity, prudence; men with their eyes ever on the hills, where strength and the royal courage thrive.



Rupert had waited for his manhood; and now it grew to flower with amazing speed and certainty. The muddled years behind, the scholarly aloofness from life's warfare and its seeming disillusionments, grew faint and shadowy. He went about the Prince's business, a man carrying men's lives, and the joy of it was as if the pipes called him up and down the broken country to swift and pleasant battle.

He learned much these days, as men do who ride with the lone hand on the bridle-rein—learned to keep his body hard, and his soul clean, because he was adventuring, not his own safety, but that of comrades who trusted him. Trust? As he rode through the lonely glens, seeing past days and future spread out before him like a clear-drawn map, he grew more and more aware that there is no stronger stirrup-cup for a rider-out to drink than the waters of deep trust. A man's faith in himself grows weak, or arrogant, or hardened; but the high trust given him by others, who look to him and cannot see him fail, is like a fixed star shining far ahead.

It was no easy life, as ease is counted. The year was getting on to spring, as they reckon seasons London way; but here among the mountains winter was tarrying, a guest who knew his welcome long outstayed, and whose spite was kindled. Night by night, as Rupert went by the lonely tracks, the wind blew keen and bitter from the east; and snow fell often; and rheumatism, sharp and unromantic, was racking his wet body. Yet still his knees were firm about the saddle, his handling of the reins secure; for he was learning horsemanship these days.

And sometimes, at unlikeliest moments, there came a brief, bewildering summer to his soul. He knew that Nance was thinking of him—was trusting him, as all these others did. He would see the moors and the denes that had bred him—would hear the pleasant folk-speech of Lancashire, as he passed greeting with farmers on the road—would remember the way of his heart, as it leaped out to Nance in the old, unproven days. These were his intervals of rest; for God

lets no man's zeal consume him altogether, until his time is ripe to go. And then he would put dreams from him, as if they were a crime, and would touch his pocket to learn if the dispatches were secure, and would ride forward, carrying his life through the winding passes, through the Scottish caution of lairds who were doubtful whether it were worth while to join a Prince in hot retreat.

It was so he came to Culloden Moor—wet, rheumatic, and untiring—on the Fifteenth of April, and had audience of the Prince. He had come from the north side of the River Spey, and was ignorant that the enemy, under the Duke of Cumberland's command, was encamped not far away, ready to give battle on the morrow.

The Prince acknowledged Rupert's coming with a quick, friendly smile. "Ah, you, sir! You're the pick of my gentlemen since Oliphant of Muirhouse died."

And Rupert, forgetting that he had ridden far, carrying urgent news, was aghast that one who had fed his boyish dreams—one who had brightened the hard face of endeavour for him—should have gone out of reach of human touch and speech. "He's dead, your Highness? I—I loved him," he said brokenly.

"Then be glad," said the Prince, as if he talked gently to a younger brother. "He died in Carlisle Castle, after a cruel ride on my behalf. But he was not taken, sir, as all the others were. There was Colonel Towneley there—a comrade I had proved—and they tell me he's on his way south to Tower Hill. I would rather die as Oliphant—God rest him!—died."

Rupert, blind and heart-sick, fumbled for his dispatches—dispatches that, twice to-day, had all but cost him his life—and handed them to the Prince, who turned them over carelessly and put them down.

"By your leave," said the Prince, with a quiet laugh, "these can wait a little. There's battle on the moor to-morrow."

Then Rupert learned what was in the doing; and his first grief for Oliphant grew dulled, because the chance of open

fight had come, after incessant riding through the nights that had brought him little company.

"There, you'll need rest!" said the Prince, with a kindly touch on his arm.

And again Rupert smiled, with disarming frankness. "I've had five-and-twenty years of rest, your Highness. It is better to be up Culloden braes to-morrow."

"Gad, sir! you're Oliphant—just Oliphant, come to life again, with all his obstinate, queer zeal. Make your peace, lad, and sleep a while—we come into our kingdom either way to-morrow."

Through that night, in between the slumber that was forced on him by sheer weight of tiredness, Rupert held fast the last words of the Prince. It was their strength—the Stuart's strength and his, that, either way, they came into their kingdom. The Georgian troops, sleeping or waking till the dawn's bugle notes rang out, had only one way of victory; they must conquer, or lose all, in this world's battle; it was a sealed riddle to them that a man may find true gain in loss.

The dawn came red and lonely over Culloden Moor, and the austere hills, as they cleared their eyes of mist-grey sleep, looked down on a fury in the making, on preparations for a battle whose tragedy is sobbing to this day.

Rupert, his heart on fire as he went through that day's eagerness—the Prince, who found recompense in action for the indignities of Derby—the Highlanders, who were fighting with the zest of children dancing round a village Maypole—could never afterwards reconstruct the sharp and shifting issues of the battle, could not guess how it came that all their gallantry, their simple hope, were broken by the stolid foreign soldiery.

Even at the bridge, where they came on with shield and dirk and claymore against the Duke's three lines of musketry—the first line kneeling, the second stooping, the third standing to full height—when they lay in tangled, writhing heaps, shot down at twenty paces, those of the Highlanders whose

eyes were clear above disasters of the body were surprised that love of their Prince had not disarmed the musketry; and they tried to get up again, and died in the simple faith that had taught them how to fight and how to die.

The Prince galloped up to the company of MacDonalds, who had stood sullenly aloof because, at the beginning of the fight, they had not been given the first post of danger.

"MacDonalds!" he said. "Who comes with me to the bridge?"

They forgot their sulkiness, forgot allegiance to their chieftain. There was the Stuart here, his face crimsoned by a glancing musket-shot, his voice alive and dominant. From frank disaster, from toothache and the miry roads, from this day's battle, which had found him skilled in fight, he had learned his kingship.

The MacDonald turned sharply round, putting himself between his clansmen and the Prince. "We stay," he said, with peremptory and harsh command. "They would not give us the right wing of the battle—we'll take no other."

The Prince saw them halt in the midst of their eager rush to serve him—saw them look at each other, waver, and stand still. A call stronger than his own had come to them—the call that is in each man's blood, blowing willy-nilly like the wind and bidding him obey the teaching of dead forefathers. Their hearts were toward the Prince—they hungered for this onset at the bridge—but they held back, just as at Derby, because old allegiance was demanded by their chieftain.

"Macdonalds!" cried the Prince again, with desperate eagerness. "Who's for the bridge?"

And then, before he guessed their purpose, some of his gentlemen rode close about him, clutched his reins, compelled him to desert the field.

"All's lost, your Highness—except your safety," said one.

He struggled to get free of them. "My pleasure," he said hotly, "is to die as poorer friends are doing."

They would not listen. Their love of him—whether it took

a misguided form or no—compelled them to use force, to disregard commands, entreaties. His vision, maybe, was clearer than their own. They were concerned with his immediate welfare, could not look into the years ahead that were to be a lingering, heart-broken death, instead of the pleasant end he craved.

They got him to a place of safety, and he glanced at them with a reproof so sad and desolate that for the first time they doubted their own wisdom.

"Gentlemen, it was not well done," he said, "but one day, if God wills, I shall forgive you."

Below them, the Duke of Cumberland had his way with the broken Highlanders. Across the moor, and back again, his troopers swept, till the field was like a shambles. The Highlanders disdained to ask for quarter; the others were too drunk with lust of slaughter to think of it; and the roll-call of the dead that day among the clans was a tribute to the Stuart and their honour. There were near a quarter wounded; but these were outnumbered by the dead.

And yet the Duke had not supped well enough. In his face, as he rode up and down the field, was a light not good for any man to see—the light that had touched it dimly when he laid siege to Carlisle and talked of whetting his appetite by slaughter of its garrison.

He was unsatisfied, though the wind came down from the moor and sobbed across the desolation he had made. He checked his horse, pointed to the wounded.

"Dispatch these rebels, gentlemen," he said to the officers about him.

And then, as at Carlisle, the English among his following withdrew from the uncleanness of the man. "We are officers, your Highness," said one.

"Aye, and gentlemen. I know your ladylike speech. For my part, I'm a soldier—"

"A butcher, by your leave," snapped the other.

The Duke turned savagely on him; but the English closed

round their comrade, and their meaning was plain enough to be read.

"Must I do the work myself?" he snarled.

"It would seem so, if it must be done."

And afterwards the gloaming, sad and restless, crept down from the grey hills, shrouding the dead and wounded. It found Cumberland master of the field; but he was surfeited, and the true luck of the battle was with those who had died in faith, or with those others of the Prince's army who were seeking cover among the northern hills. For it is not gain or loss that matters, but the cleanly heart men bring to acceptance of the day's fortune.

Among the fugitives were some of the men of Lancashire who had ridden out to join the Prince at Langton; and these foregathered, by some clan instinct of their own, in a little wood five miles away from the trouble of Culloden Moor. Sir Jasper was there, and Rupert, and Maurice, all carrying wounds of one sort or another. Demaine's bailiff was there, untouched and full of grumbles as of old. But Squire Demaine himself was missing, and young Hunter of Hunterscliff; and Maurice told how he had seen them die, close beside him, at the ditch that lay fifty paces from Culloden Bridge.

"God rest them!" said Sir Jasper, not halting for the sorrow that would come by and by. "They've done with trouble, friends, but we have not."

Half that night they rested in the sodden wood, with a chill wind for blanket; but they were afoot again long before dawn, and overtook the Prince's company at Ruthven. A council was held just after their arrival, and the Prince—who, before ever Culloden battle found him in the thick of it, had not slept for eight-and-forty hours—was still solicitous touching the welfare of his friends. He bade the native-born make for their own homes, the English choose the likeliest road to safety that offered; for himself, he would keep a few friends about him, and would take his chance among the hills. And when

his gentlemen demurred, wishing to remain, he faced them with the pleasant humour that no adversary could kill.

"I was not permitted to command when we were in advance," he said; "but, gentlemen, we're in retreat—and surely I may claim the privilege?"

When they had gone their separate ways in little companies—reluctantly, and looked backward at the Stuart, who was meat, and wine, and song to them—the Prince himself was left with ten gentlemen about him. Nine of them were Scotsmen, but the tenth was Rupert, who had a surprising gift these days for claiming the post of direst hazard.

And through that sick retreat the scattered companies were aware of the qualities that disaster brings out more clearly than any victory can do. Oliphant of Muirhouse, dead for the Cause and happy in the end he craved, had asked Sir Jasper long ago at Windyhough if Will Underwood, brave in the open hunt, were strong enough to stand a siege; and these fugitives, going east and west and north—hopeless and spurred forward only by the pursuit behind, the homesickness ahead—were aware, each one of the them, what Oliphant had meant.

The Highlanders, trudging over hill-tracks to their shielings, were buried in a mist of sorrow, that only battle could disperse. Lord Murray, riding for his own country, was reflective, soured, and peevish, because his cold arithmetic of war was disproven by results. Yet, through the disillusion and weariness of this wild scamper for the hills, the strong souls of the Rising proved their mettle. The Prince, Lochiel, the good and debonair, Sir Jasper and his hunting men of Lancashire—those who had lost most, because their hope had been most keen, were the strong men in retreat.

And Rupert, sharing the Prince's dangers and his confidence more closely every day, rode up and down among the hills like a man possessed by some good angel that would not let him fear, or rest, or feel the aches that wet roads by day, wet beds by night entailed on him. Whenever a messenger

was needed to go into dangerous country and fear nothing, he claimed first privilege; and it was granted him, for he had learned a strange persuasiveness.

He was at Benicula with the Prince, where they and the crew of a small boat that had landed them met a storm of rain that was to last for fourteen hours; where they found an empty cottage, with a store of firelogs; where the Prince bought a cow for thirty shillings, and proved himself the best cook of them all. They had food that night, and a bottle of brandy among the six who still kept company together; and these unwonted luxuries brought the best gift of all—sleep, that is dear to buy when men have kept weariness at bay too long.

Rupert was at Corradale, too, where for three weeks they found safety among the islanders of Uist. The royal baggage was no heavier than a couple of shirts, and the Prince was housed in a byre so weather-rotted that he had to sleep o' nights under a tent made of branches and cow-hides, to keep the rain from him. Yet his cheerfulness was unfeigned, for he was tired of prudence and spent his whole days hunting deer on the hills or fishing in the bay. The Uist folk knew him, and the price upon his head; the neighboring isles were thick with soldiery in pursuit, and gunboats were busy among the inland seas; and yet he moved abroad as if he were some big-hearted country gentleman, intent only on following his favourite sports in time of peace.

"You wear a charmed life, your Highness," said Rupert, as they came down one day from shooting deer. It was near the end of their three weeks' sojourn on the island, and the danger set so close about the Prince had harassed him, as no perils of his own could do.

"I believe you, sir," said the other, turning suddenly. "I bear a charmed life. So does any man for whom God finds a need. We die, I think, when our work is done, but not an hour before." And with that he laughed, and got out his clay pipe. "We shall sup on venison to-night, my friend,

and I am hungry. You should not tempt me with matters of theology."

And so it was afterwards, when they left Uist to go through constant perils, by land and sea. The Prince brought to it all—discomfort, pursuit outwitted by a hair's breadth time after time—the same unyielding outlook. Fools and cowards might fold their hands, reconstructing yesterday and bewailing all the misadventures that might have been avoided had they done this, done that; but the Stuart took life up from each day's beginning, and went forward, praying in entire simplicity that his shoulders might be broadened to the coming burden.

When at last, near the end of June, they came near the Skye country, a new, surprising page was turned of the story of these hunted folk. Until now they had been among men, fighting the enemy at Culloden, eluding him during the incessant, long retreat. But now a woman stepped into their lives again; and, because faith and old habit had trained them that way, they were glad that a thread of gold had come to bind the rough wounds of life together.

Not till he died would Rupert forget those days in the Western Isles. Their grace passed into abiding folksong before the year was out; and he was privileged to watch, step by step, the growth of a high regard such as the world seldom sees.

He saw Flora MacDonald's first coming to the Prince—at Rossinish, in Uist—saw the long, startled glance they exchanged, as if each had been looking for the other since time's beginning. And then he saw her curtsey low, saw him lift her with tender haste.

"I should kneel to you instead, Miss MacDonald," he said. "You've volunteered to be my guide through dangerous seas, they tell me, and I fear for your safety, and yet—I ever liked brave women."

Rupert had changed his trade of messenger for that of boatman, and was one of the six rowers who rested on their oars in the roomy fishing-coble that was waiting to carry the Prince

to Skye. There was a wild gale blowing, but the June night was clear with a sort of tempered daylight, and Rupert watched these two, standing on the strip of sandy shore, with a queer sense of intuition. The discipline of night-riding, its loneliness and urgency, teaches a man to look on at any happening with eyes keen for the true, sharp detail of it; and the two figures, as he saw them now, seemed transfigured, secure for the moment in some dream of a past life they had shared together.

There was the Prince, his head lifted buoyantly, his lips smiling as if Culloden had never been. There was Miss MacDonald—four-and-twenty, keen for loyalty and sacrifice—with something more than loyalty making a happy light about her face. She had none of the fripperies that set men's wits astray and poison their clean hold on life; but, from her buckled shoes to her brown, shapely head, she was trim, and debonair, and bonnie, made to keep pace with men along the road of high endeavour.

Rupert, resting on his oar, felt a touch of loneliness and heartache. This lass of MacDonald's recalled the Lancashire hills to him because she was so like Nance Demaine, for whose sake he was proving himself along the troubled ways. And then he had no time for heartache; for the Prince was handing Miss MacDonald into the boat, and the rowers were bidden to make for the first unguarded landing-place in Skye which they could find.

They had an evil passage. The wind never ceased to wail and scream across the foamy breakers, but the storm was not dark enough to hide them, and in the half-light their boat showed clear against the grey-blue of the heaving seas. Gunboats were out, searching for the fugitive, who was known to be somewhere in among the isles; and once a hail of shot passed over them from a man-of-war that set sail in pursuit, but could not take them because the wind was contrary.

For eight hours the rowers strove with the long passage overseas from Uist, their arms unwearying at the oars. And

the Prince would take more than his share of the toil, telling them that he was the cause of this night voyage and should lend a willing hand on that account. They came to Skye at long last, and tried to put in at Waternish on the west coast, but found a company of soldiery encamped about a roaring fire, and had to put back again into the teeth of the wind. And, as if wind and seas were not enough, the men on shore pursued them with a rousing volley. One bullet struck the boat's side, and a score others hit the water close about them, and rebounded, and went out across the waves with a sharp, mournful wail, shrill as the pipes when they are sorrowful.

No one on board was hit; but the Prince, seeing Miss MacDonald shrink, put out a hand and touched her, as a devout lover might. And the two took hurried counsel. It seemed best to cross Snizort Loch, and so reach Monkstadt, where a kinsman of her own would give them shelter—unless there, too, the soldiery were quartered.

The Prince wished once again to take an oar, though his hands were raw and bleeding; but no man would give up the rowing that, for sake of him they carried, was pleasant to them; and so, lest he should be idle altogether, he sang old, loyal songs to them, and jested, and made their burden lighter—a gift of his. And then Miss MacDonald, whose pluck was not to be denied, broke down for a little while, because she was spent with endeavour and the wild tumult of the Stuart's coming. And Rupert, tugging at his oar, watched the Prince persuade her to lie down in the bottom of the coble, saw him take off his plaid and cover her with practical and quiet solicitude, as if he had the right to guard her.

And through the rest of that night-crossing the Prince kept stubborn guard about his rescuer, who was sleeping now like a child, lest any of the rowers should touch her with his foot in moving up and down to ease his limbs. And Rupert, though his wits were muddled with incessant toil by land and sea, felt something stir at the soul of him, as he saw the way,

of the Prince's regard for this daughter of the MacDonalds. Again it seemed to him that these two had known each other long ago, before the world grew old, and tired, and prone to gossip. And again he remembered Nance Demaine, who had touched his boyhood with the fire that does not die.

They came to Monkstadt in safety, but learned that the enemy was in possession of the house. And afterwards it was to and fro on foot across the good isle of Skye, for many days, until they came to the house of Kingsborough, where Flora's home was with her mother and stepfather.

It was a queer incoming, touched with laughter and the needs of every day, as all big enterprises are until we view them in the retrospect. There was Kingsborough—the biggest of the big MacDonalds—going in before to prepare his wife for the intrusion. And he was manifestly afraid, as the big, open-air men are when they are dwarfed by house-walls and the indoor cleanliness.

Kingsborough, after bowing the Prince into the square, tidy hall, asked leave to go up and tell his wife the news. And presently, from above stairs—while Flora and the Stuart waited in the hall—the laird's wife broke into practical and shrill complaint.

"There's the danger, Kingsborough; and, fore-bye, there's so little in the house. Collops, and eggs, and a dish of oatmeal—how should I face the Prince, God bless him, with eggs and collops?"

The Prince laughed suddenly. And Miss MacDonald, standing apart with the unrest and trouble of her deepening regard for the Stuart she had rescued, glanced across at him, wondering that he could be gay; and then she laughed with him, for the tart good-humour of her mother's voice was practical, and far removed from the glamour the two fugitives had shared.

"You may face me, Mrs. MacDonald," he said, going to the stairfoot. "Collops and eggs are dainties to me these days; and, indeed, I am very hungry."

So there was a hurried toilet made, and the mistress of the house came down, half of her the laird's wife, instinct with the dignity that knows its station, the other half a picture of curiosity, surprise, bewildered curtseys, because the Stuart claimed her hospitality.

They supped that night as if they dined in state. To any meal, to any company, the Prince brought that grace which is not lightly won—the grace to touch common things with poetry, and to make a dish of collops as proud as if it were a boar's head brought in to table by stately lackeys.

Rupert, supping with them, noted less the Prince's great air of ease—he was accustomed to it long ago—than the punctilious and minute regard he showed to Miss MacDonald. Whenever she moved to leave the room—intent on seeing to the dishes in the kitchen—he rose and bowed her out. When she returned, he rose, and would not be seated till she had taken her place again.

"You'll turn poor Flora's head, your Highness," said Mrs. MacDonald once, after Flora had gone out, some shrewd maternal instinct warring with her loyalty.

"The head that guided me from Uist to Skye, and to your hospitality, would not be lightly turned. I *choose* to honour your daughter, Mrs. MacDonald, by your leave."

"But, your Highness, she's only a daft slip of a girl. I weaned and reared her, and should know."

"You did not cross with us from Uist. And afterwards there were the days and nights in Skye, the rains, and the patient watching; madam, as God sees us, Miss Flora carries the bravest soul in Scotland. I cannot do her too much honour."

Kingsborough, big and simple-hearted—his wife, thrifty and not prone to sentiment—looked at their guest with frank astonishment. He had been so gay, so debonair, until a chance word had touched the depths in him. How could they understand him? They had not been through the glamour and wild seas, as he had been since Miss MacDonald came to

serve him. They did not know the clean, quick love that had lain here in wait for him among the western isles.

Flora came in again, carrying a dish of hot scones. She was aware of some new gravity that had settled on the company, and her glance sought the Prince's with instinctive question.

"Yes," he said, "I was praising Miss MacDonald in her absence. You must forgive me."

Late that night, when he and Rupert were alone with their host, the Prince fell into a mood of reckless gaiety. For a while his journeyings were ended. He had supped royally; he was to enjoy the luxury of a mattress and clean sheets, after many nights spent in the heather or in wave-swept boats; and the sheer physical comfort of it was strangely pleasant.

He was a good companion, with a story here, a jest there, that set big Kingsborough laughing till he feared to wake the goodwife up above. He taught the laird the true way of mixing whisky-punch. He would not be cajoled to bed, because the respite of this sitting beside a warm hearth, with friends beside him and Miss MacDonald somewhere in the house, was more than food and drink to him.

"We must make an early start to-morrow," said Kingsborough, when at last his guest rose. "It is imperative, your Highness."

"No, friend," said the other, with pleasant unconcern. "To-night I sleep—I tell you, I must sleep. The most willing horse, Mr. MacDonald, has need of the stable in between-whiles."

He knew himself and his needs; and, with a purpose as settled as his zeal at other times to undergo wakefulness and unremitting hardship, he slept that night so deep that only armed intrusion would have roused him.

Kingsborough and Rupert, pacing up and down below stairs the next morning, were consumed with dread for the Stuart's safety. The laird's wife feared every moment that

the enemy would come battering at her door. Only Miss MacDonald was cool and practical.

"His Highness has the gift of knowing when to keep awake," she said, a little undernote of pride and tenderness in her voice—"the gift of knowing when to sleep."

And her faith was justified. The Prince came down two hours beyond the time that Kingsborough had planned—came down with a light step, and a face from which sleep had wiped away a year of sorrow. He bade farewell to the laird's wife, who was crying like a child to see him so pleasantly in love with danger, and was turning from the door, when he began to bleed at the nose. Kingsborough's wife handed him a kerchief, bewailing the ill omen.

"No," said the Prince, with unconquerable twisting of crooked issues to a clean, straight shape. "The omen's good. Blood has been shed for me, and I'm paying a few of my debts, Mrs. MacDonald. I should not like it to be said that I left your Highland country a defaulter."

The three of them set out—the Prince, and Flora, and Rupert—and Kingsborough turned suddenly from watching the Stuart out of sight. "By God, wife," he said suddenly, "we've given houseroom to a man!"

"He's for death, Hugh," the goodwife answered, her thrifty mind returning to calculation of the odds against the fugitive.

Kingsborough took a wide look at the hills, where sun and mist and shadows chased each other across the striding rises. "Death?" he snapped. "It comes soon or late—but the soul of a man outrides it."

It was on their way to Portree that the three fugitives learned how clearly Miss MacDonald's faith in her Prince had been justified. They met a shepherd—Donald MacDonald by name—who told them that, two hours before, "the foreigners" had been up and down between Portree and Kingsborough, searching for the Prince. They had left the island a half-hour ago, he added, following some new rumour that his Highness was still hiding in South Uist.

"If I'd not slept so late, we should all three of us have been taken, Miss MacDonald," said the Prince, as they went forward.

"I trusted you," she answered. And the quietness of her voice rang like a bugle-call.

And Rupert, with that fine sixth sense that a man learns from hazard and night-riding, knew that these two were talking with the freemasonry of souls that have learned kinship and proved it through long, disastrous roads.

They went to Portree, and found an eight-oared boat there, with seven rowers in it. Rupert went on board, took his place at the eighth oar. And again, as far away in Uist—and years ago, it seemed—he watched the Prince and Miss MacDonald foregathered on the shore. In Uist they had met, these two, under a driving wind that blew across the tempered radiance of the June night hours. Here they were standing in hot daylight, with never a breeze to ruffle the happy face of land and sea. And yet they had been glad in Uist, with the storm about them; and here in Skye they stood, and looked at one another, and were empty of all hope.

They had spent few days together, as time is reckoned, the Prince and Miss MacDonald of the isles. But the days they shared had been packed full of hardship, danger of pursuing soldiery, peril of their warm, human liking for each other—the human liking that gains depth and strength from trouble. The Prince had gone through a Scotland set thick with women who asked a love-lock, a glance, and all that follows. He had kept troth instead with the stubborn march of men who followed the open road with him. Women came before and after strife—that had been his gospel, until he met Miss MacDonald, good to look at, and brave to rescue him.

And now they stood together on the shore of Portree Bay. They were Prince and loyal subject, and yet they were children crying in the dark, needing each other, heartsick at parting, ready, if their faith had been a little weaker, to catch at

the coward's proverb that the world is well lost for a love forbidden.

To these two, parting on the edge of Portree Bay, there came a sudden intuition of the soul. They saw—almost as if it stood between them—a sword, keen-edged, and clean, and silvery—the sword that had guarded them safely through worse dangers than gunboats and the stormy seas. They saw the days behind—the few days granted them for comradeship—the years stretching out and out ahead, empty and steep and wind-swept as the lone hill-tracks of Skye.

The rowers waited, impatient to be off, because each moment lost was packed with danger. But these two would never again fear any sort of hazard; they had gained too much, were losing too much.

Their glances met. One was taking the high road trod by the bleeding feet of royalty; the other was taking the low road, that led to the house of Kingsborough, its maddening, quiet routine of housewifery—mending of the laird's stockings, seeing that Mrs. MacDonald's fowls were tended, going, day by day, and year by year, through the sick, meaningless routine of housework.

And one knew that, wherever his feet were planted, his heart would return constantly to the misty isle that had taught him the strong love and the lasting. And the other knew that she would never cease to look out from Kingsborough's windows, when leisure served, and trick herself into the belief that her man was returning—crowned or uncrowned, she cared not which—was returning, with the wind in his feet and the glad look in his face, to tell her all the things unspoken during these last days of trial.

The sun beat hot on the rowers' backs, and this parting seemed long to them. To Miss MacDonald and the Prince it seemed brief, because the coming separation showed endless as eternity.

And then at last the Prince stooped to her hand, and kissed

it. "Your servant, Miss MacDonald," he said—"your servant till I die, God knows."

Rupert watched it all with eyes trained to understanding. And, when the fugitives were aboard and they were straining at their oars, he was sure that the Prince would give one long, backward glance at Miss MacDonald. But the Stuart was older to life's teaching, and would not look behind when he had chosen the plain road ahead. His eyes were set forward—forward, over the dappled, summer seas, to the days of hiding and unrest waiting for him. And through his bitterness and lonely need for Miss MacDonald he found a keen, high courage, as the man's way is. And Flora MacDonald, as the woman's way is, watched the boat grow less and less until it was a dark speck dancing on a sea of violet, and green, and amethyst, and fought for the resignation that brings peace, but never the trumpet-note of gladness that had kept her company on the dangerous seas.



CHAPTER XXI

LOVE IN EXILE

THE Skye boatmen took their Prince safely to the mainland, and were not ashamed because they wept at parting from him. And then the Stuart and Sir Jasper's heir set out again along the lone tracks that taught them understanding of each other—understanding of the world that does not show its face among the crowded haunts where men lie and slander and drive hard bargains one against the other. Their bodies were hard, for wind and weather had toughened them till they were lean and rugged as upland trees that have grown strong with storm. Their courage was steady, because all except life was lost. And at their hearts there was a quick, insistent music, as if the pipes were playing. They were fighting against long odds, and they were northern born; and the world, in some queer way, went not amiss with them.

Rupert, in between the journeys and the vigils shared with the Prince, was often abroad on the errands that had grown dear to him since coming into Scotland. He would ride here, ride there, with night and danger for companions, gathering news of the enemies, the friends, who could be counted on. And he found constantly the stirring knowledge that, though he had not been keen to ride to hounds in Lancashire, he was hot to take his fences now.

On one of these days he rode in, tired and spent, bringing news from the braes of Glenmoriston, and found the Stuart smoking his pipe, while he skinned a deer that he had shot.

"You are killing yourself for loyalty," said the Prince, glancing at him with a sudden, friendly smile.

"By your leave, sir," said Rupert, as if he talked of Murray's plain arithmetic, "I am alive at last."

" You're made of the martyr's stuff," said the other.

" Your Highness, they called me the scholar there in Lancashire, and I knew what that meant. I am trying to outride the shame."

Rupert was tired out. The Prince was tired at heart, because of Culloden, because of Miss MacDonald, whom he was not to see again, and all the dreams that had tumbled from the high skies to sordid earth. Neither of them had tasted food for six-and-thirty hours. And at these times men are apt to find a still, surprising companionship, such as the tramps know who foot it penniless along the roads.

" We have found our kingdom, you and I," said the Prince, with sudden intuition—" here on the upland tracks, where a man learns something of the God who made him."

Rupert looked out across the mountains, blue-purple in the gloaming, and caught the other's mood, and spoke as a friend does to a friend, when the heart needs a confidant. " It is all a riddle," he said slowly. " I thought all lost, after Culloden—and yet I've tasted happiness, tasted it for the first time in my life. To carry your life on the saddle with me, to keep open eyes when I'm sick for sleep, to know that the Stuart trusts me—I tell you, I have tasted glory."

The Prince turned his head aside. This was the loyalty known to him since he first set foot in Scotland, the service he claimed, he knew not why, from gentle and simple of his well-wishers. And he was remembering how many of these eager folk had died on his behalf, was forgetting that he, too, had gone sleepless through peril and disaster because he carried at his saddle-bow, not one life only, but a kingdom's fate.

" Your news from Glenmoriston, sir?" he asked sharply.

" Pleasant news. A man has died for you, with gallantry."

" You call it pleasant news?"

" Listen, your Highness! It was one Roderick MacKenzie—he was a merchant in Edinburgh, and left the town to follow you; and he found his way, after Culloden, to the hills about Glenmoriston. He was alone, and a company of the enemy

surprised him; and he faced them, and killed two before they overcame him; and he died in anguish, but found strength to lift himself just before the end. He knew that he was like you, in height and face, and cried, ‘God forgive you, you have killed your Prince!’”

“It was brave; it was well meant. But, sir, it is not pleasant news.”

“He bought your safety. They are carrying his head to London to claim the ransom. And the troops have left the hills, your Highness—they believe you dead.”

“I wish their faith were justified,” said the other, with the bitterness that always tortured him when he heard that men had died on his behalf. “Your pardon,” he added by and by. “I should thank you for the news—and yet I cannot.”

The next day they climbed the brae and went down the long, heathery slope that took them to Glenmoriston; and nowhere was there ambush or pursuit, as Rupert had foretold—only crying of the birds on hilly pastures, and warmth of the July sun as it ripened the ling to full bloom, and humming of the bees among the early bell-heather.

They came to the glen at last, and ahead of them, a half-mile away, there was blue smoke rising from the chimney of a low, ill-thatched farmstead. And the Prince touched Rupert’s arm as they moved forward.

“Lord, how hunger drums at a man’s ribs!” he said, with a tired laugh. “If there were all the Duke’s army lying in wait for us yonder, we should still go on, I think. There may be collops there, and eggs—all the good cheer that Mrs. MacDonald thought scanty when we came to the laird’s house at Kingsborough.”

“By your leave,” said Rupert gravely, “it does not bear speaking of. I begin to understand how Esau felt when he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage.”

They reached the house, and they found there six outlaws of the hills, ready with the welcome Rupert had made secure before he led the Prince here. They had entrenched them-

selves in this wild glen, had ridden abroad, robbing with discretion, but never hurting a man who was too poor to pay tribute. Their name was a byword for cattle-lifting, and they lived for plunder. Yet, somehow, when the Stuart came among them, with thirty thousand pounds easy in the gaining, they disdained blood-money.

For all that, another hope of the Prince's crumbled and went by him, after he had greeted his new hosts. There were neither eggs nor collops in the house—only a dish of oatmeal, without milk to ease its roughness. The Glenmoriston men explained that Cumberland's soldiery had been about the glen, had raided their cattle and sheep, had laid bare the countryside.

"For all that," said the Prince, unconquerable in disaster, "I thank you for your oatmeal. As God sees me, you have stilled a little of the ache I had."

And the Glenmoriston men liked the way of him. And when, next day, he and Rupert went up the hills and stalked a deer, and brought it home for the cooking, their loyalty was doubled.

Through the days that followed the outlaws found leisure to prove the guests they harboured. In the hill countries a man's reputation stands, not on station or fair words, but on the knowledgeable, quiet outlook his neighbours bring to bear on him. And ever a little more the outlaws liked these two, who were lean and hard and weather-bitten as themselves.

The Prince would not claim shelter in the house, because long use had taught him to prefer a bed among the heather. And Rupert, lying near by o' nights, learned more of the Stuart than all these last disastrous days had taught him. When a man sleeps in the open, forgetting there may be a listener, he is apt to lose his hold on the need for reticence that house walls bring.

The Prince, half between sleep and waking, would lift himself on an elbow, would murmur that men had died for him—men better than himself, who had followed him for loyalty

and not for hire, men whom he should have shepherded to better purpose. And then he would snatch an hour or two of sleep, and would wake again with a question, sharp and hurried and unquiet.

"Where's Miss MacDonald? She's in danger. The seas are riding high—they're riding high, I say!—and there's only my poor plaid to cover her."

And so it was always when the Prince rambled in his sleep. There was never a complaint on his own behalf, never a wild lament that he was skulking, a broken man, among the mountains after coming near to London and high victory. He had two griefs only, in the night hours that probe to the heart of a man—passionate regret for the slain, passionate regard for Miss MacDonald's safety.

And once the Prince, though he lay in a dead sleep, began to speak of Miss MacDonald with such praise, such settled and devout regard, that Rupert got up from the heather and went out into the still summer night, lest he pried too curiously into sacred things. And as he went up and down the glen, scenting the subtle odours that steal out at night-time, his thoughts ran back to Lancashire. It seemed long since he had roamed the moors in bygone summers, with just these keen, warm scents about him, counting himself the scholar, aching for Nance Demaine, dreaming high, foolish dreams of a day that should come which would prove him fit to wear her favour.

And he was here, leaner and harder than of old, with a deed or two to his credit. And he had learned a week ago, while riding on the Prince's business, that Lady Royd and Nance had come to Edinburgh, intent on sharing the work of brave women there who were aiding fugitives, by means fair or crafty, to reach the shores of France. He knew that his father and Maurice were safely over-seas; and a sudden hope flashed across the hard, unremitting purpose that had kept his knees close about the saddle these last days. When the Prince was secure, when these hazards were over—the hazards that

had grown strangely pleasant—there might be leisure to return to earlier dreams, to wake and find them all come true.

For an hour Rupert paced the glen, with gentler thoughts for company than he had known since he first killed a man at the siege of Windyhough. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he remembered to-morrow and its needs, and went back and settled himself to sleep; but he did not lie so near to the Prince as before, lest he overhear him talk again of Miss MacDonald.

The next day news came that the soldiery were out among the hills again. The gallant head of Roderick MacKenzie, who had earned a long respite for his Prince, had been taken to London, and men who knew the Stuart had sworn that it bore little likeness to him; and news had been sped north, by riders killing a horse at every journey's end, that the Prince was still at large among the Highlands.

The Glenmoriston men were unmoved by this new trouble. They explained, with careless humour, that their glen was already so stripped of food as to be scarce worth living in; and they went out with their guests into the unknown perils waiting for them as if they went to revelry. And the Prince learned afresh that a man, when his back is to the wall, had best not seek friends among the sleek and prosperous, who have cherished toys to love, but among the outlaws and the driven folk who know the open road of life.

It was by aid of the Glenmoriston men, their knowledge of the passes, that the fugitives came safe to Lochiel's country of Lochaber, that, after dangers so close-set as to be almost laughable—so long the odds against them were—they reached the shore of Loch Moidart and found a French privateer beating about the coast. Those on board the ship were keeping an anxious look-out toward both land and sea; they had been advised that the Prince, with luck, might reach Moidart about noon, and they knew, from sharp experience during their voyage to the bay, that the enemy's gunboats were thick as flies about the western isles.

It was an odd company that gathered on the strand while the ship beat inshore with the half of a light, uncertain wind. The Prince was there, Lochiel and Rupert, and a small band of loyal gentry who had been in hiding round about their homes. Yet a beggar in his rags and tatters might have joined them and claimed free passage to the French coast, so far as outward seeming went. Their clothes were made up of odds and ends, begged or borrowed during the long retreat. All were itching from the attacks of the big, lusty fleas that abound along the loyal isles. The one sign that proved them the Stuart's gentlemen was a certain temperate ease of carriage, a large disdain of circumstance, a security, gay and dominant, in the faith that preferred beggarman's rags to fine raiment bought by treachery. They did not fear, did not regret, though they were leaving all that meant home and the cosy hearth.

The Prince, while the French ships were beating inshore, took Lochiel aside. Through the wild campaign they had been like twin brothers, these two, showing the same keen faith, the like courage under hardship.

"Lochiel, you know the country better than I. You're bred to your good land, while I was only born to it. You will tell me where the Isle of Skye lies from here."

"Yonder," said the other, pointing across the grey-blue haze of summer seas.

And the Prince stood silent, thinking of the victory there in Skye—the victory that had left him wearier than Culloden's sick defeat had done. And Lochiel, who had had his own affairs to attend to lately, and had been aloof from gossip, wondered as he saw the trouble in the other's face.

The Prince turned at last. "Lochiel," he said, with a tired smile, "how does the Usurper's proclamation run? Thirty thousand pounds on my head—dead or alive! Well, alive or dead, I wish this tattered body of mine were still in Skye—in Skye, Lochiel, where I left the soul of me."

"You are sad, your Highness—"

"Sad? Nay, I've waded deeper than mere sadness, like the Skye mists out yonder. Well, we stand where we stand, friend," he added, with sharp return from dreams, "and the ship is bringing to."

There was still a little while before the boats were lowered from the shore, and the Prince, pacing up and down the strand, encountered Rupert. "A fine ending!" he said, with temperate bitterness. "I landed in Lochaber from France with seven gentlemen. I go back with a few more. This is the fruit of your toil, Mr. Royd—and of mine."

And, "No, by your leave," said Rupert. "Your Highness has lit a fire that will never die—a fire of sheer devotion—"

"Ah! the courtier speaks."

Rupert's voice broke, harshly and without any warning. He saw his Prince in evil case, when he should have been a conqueror. He remembered the night rides, the faith, that had had the crowning of the Stuart as their goal. "A broken heart speaks—a heart broken in your service, sir," he said.

The man's strength, his candid, deep simplicity, struck home to the Prince, bringing a foolish mist about his eyes. "Your love goes deep as that?" he said.

"It goes deeper than my love of life, your Highness."

So then, after a silence, the other laid a strong kindly hand on his shoulder. "You'll go far and well for me, sir—but put away that superstition of the broken heart. Believe me, for I know"—he glanced across the misty stretch of sea that divided him from Skye—"there are broken hopes, and broken dreams, and disaster, sobbing at one's ears, but a man—a man, sir, does not permit his heart to break. You and I—I think we have our pride."

When the boats grounded on the beach, the Prince waited till his gentlemen got first aboard, and at last there were only himself and Rupert left standing on the shore.

"You will precede me, Mr. Royd. It is my privilege just now to follow, not to lead," said the Prince.

"Your Highness, I stay, by your leave."

The mist had been creeping down from the tops for the past hour, and now the light, outer fringe of it had reached the water-line. The waiting boat lay in a haze of mystery; the privateer beyond showed big and wraithlike, though a shrouded sunlight still played on the crests of mimic waves. And the Stuart and Rupert stood regarding each other gravely at this last meeting for many weeks to come.

"You stay?" echoed the Prince. "Sir, you have done so much for me—and I looked to have your company during the crossing; and, indeed, you must be ill of your exertions to decline safety now."

Rupert glanced at the ship, then at the Stuart's face. There was temptation in the longing to be near his Prince until France was reached, but none in the thought of personal safety. "I lay awake last night," he said slowly, "and it grew clear, somehow, that I was needed here in Scotland. There's the country round Edinburgh, your Highness—packed thick with loyal men who are waiting their chance to find a ship across to France—and I hold so many threads that Oliphant of Muirhouse would have handled better, if he had lived."

"Why, then," said the Prince, yielding to impulse after these months of abnegation, "we'll let our friends set sail without us. These gentry did me service. You shall teach me to return it."

"Your Highness, it would ruin all! I can ride where you cannot, because I'm of slight account——"

"So you, too, have your mathematics, like the rest," put in the other wearily—"and all your sums add up to the one total—that I must be denied the open hazard. I tell you, Mr. Royd, it is no luxury to take ship across to France and leave my friends in danger."

The mist was thickening, and Lochiel, growing anxious on account of the delay, leaped ashore and came to where the two were standing. And the Prince, returning to the prose of things, knew that he must follow the road of tired retreat mapped out for him since Derby.

"Lochiel," he said grimly, "I was planning an escape—from safety. And your eyes accuse me, because my heart is with this gentleman who chooses to stay in Scotland."

And then he told what Rupert had in mind; and Lochiel, for all the urgency, halted a moment to appraise this lean, tranquil man who met the call of destiny as if it were an invitation to some pleasant supper-party.

"It was so Oliphant carried himself, Mr. Royd," he said gravely. "God knows I wish you well."

They parted. And Rupert watched their boat reach the privateer, watched the ship's bulk glide huge and ghostly into the mists. He was hard and zealous, had chosen his road deliberately; but he was human, too, and a sense of utter loneliness crept over him. The Cause was lost. Many of his friends would not tread French or Scottish ground again, because the soil lay over them. He had not tasted food that day, and the mist seemed to be soaking into the bones of him. And loyalty, that had brought him to this pass, showed like a dim, receding star which mocked him as a will-o'-the-wisp might do.

For all that, he was born and bred a Royd, and the discipline of many months was on his side. And, little by little, he regained that steadiness of soul—not to be counterfeited or replaced by any other joy—which comes to the man whose back is to the wall, with a mob of dangers assaulting him in front.

The Glenmoriston men had been offered their chance of a passage to France with the Prince, but had declined it, preferring their own country and the dangerous life that had grown second nature to them. And Rupert, knowing the glen to which they had ridden after speeding the Stuart forward, waited till the mists had lifted a little and found his way to them.

They crossed themselves when he appeared among them as they sat on the slope of the brae, cooking the midday meal; but when he proved himself no ghost and explained the reason of his coming, and his need to be set on the way to Edinburgh,

they warmed afresh to his view of that difficult business named life. He shared their meal, and afterwards one of their number, Hector, by name, led him out along the first stage of his journey south.

The mists had cleared by this time, leaving the braesides russet where the sun swept the autumn brackens, but the mood they bring to Highlandmen was strong on Rupert's guide. Hector could find no joy in life, no talk to ease the going. Instead, he fell into a low, mournful chant; and the words of it were not calculated to raise drooping spirits:

"But I have seen a dreary dream
 Beyond the Isle o' Skye,
I saw a dead man won the fight.
 And I think that man was I."

A little chill crossed Rupert's courage, as if a touch of east wind had come from the heart of the warm skies. He had seen many dreary dreams of late; had fared beyond the Isle o' Skye; what if Hector were "seeing far," and this dirge were an omen of the coming days? And then he laughed, because in the dangerous tracks men make their own omens or disdain them altogether.

"You're near the truth, Hector," he broke in; "but it's only a half-dead man. There's life yet in him."

And Hector glowered at him; for the Highland folk, when they are hugging sadness close, cherish it as a mother does her firstborn babe. For all that, he brought Rupert safely, after three days' marching, to the next post of his journey, and passed him on to certain outlaws whose country lay farther south; and by this sort of help, after good and evil weather and some mischances by the way, Rupert came at last to Edinburgh and reached the house where he knew that Lady Royd and Nance were lodging.

The house lay very near to Holyrood; and as he went down the street Rupert halted for a while, forgetful of his errand. The tenderest moon that ever lit a troubled world looked down

on this palace of departed glories. The grey pile was mellowed, transfigured by some light o' dreams. It was as if the night knew all about the Stuarts who would haunt Holyrood so long as its walls stood ; knew their haplessness, their charm, their steadfast hold on the fine, unthrifty faith they held ; knew the answer that some of them, who had gone before, had found in the hereafter that does not weigh with the shopkeepers' scales.

There is a soul in such walls as Holyrood's, and Rupert stood as if he held communion with a friend whose sympathies ran step by step with his. Here Mary Stuart had stood alone, a queen in name, facing the barbarous, lewd nobles who were, by title of mere courtesy, her gentlemen. Here she had seen Rizzio hurried down the twisting stair, had supped with her fool-husband, Darnley. From here she had gone out, the queen of hearts and tragedy, to that long exile which was to end at Fotheringay.

Here, too, the Prince had kept high state, a year ago, and all Edinburgh had flocked to dance a Stuart measure. He came fresh from his first battle, crowned with victory and charm of person ; and the clans were rising fast ; and hope shone bright toward London and the crown.

Rupert looked at the grey pile and felt all this, as one listens to the silence of a friend who does not need to speak. And then a drift of cloud came across the moon, and Holyrood lay wan and grey. It was as if a sudden gust had quenched all the candles that had lit the ballroom here when the yellow-haired laddie came dancing south.

And still the fugitive tarried. He had been used so long to night roads and the constant peril that this dim light, and the wind piping at his ear, pleased him more than any blaze of candles and lilt of dance-music. Deep knowledge came to him, bred of the hazards that had made him hard and lean. He sorrowed no more for Derby and Culloden ; his present thirst and hunger went by him, as things of slight account ; for he remembered the long months of hiding, the intimacy

he had been privileged to share with Prince Charles Edward. There had been no glamour of the dance, no pomp, about these journeyings through the Highlands ; there had been no swift, eager challenge and applause from ladies' eyes ; and yet Rupert had tested, as few had done, the fine edge and temper of the Stuart charm.

Here, under the shadow of grey Holyrood, he loitered to recall their wayfaring together. There had been winter journeys through incessant rain, or snow, or winds that raved down mountain passes ; there had been summer travels through the heather, with the sun beating pitilessly on them, over the stark length of moors that had none but brackish water and no shade. They had slept o' nights with danger for a pillow and the raw wind for coverlet. And through it all the Prince had shown a brave, unanswerable front to the sickness of defeat, the hiding when he longed for action. If food and drink were scarce, he sang old clan songs or recalled light jests and stories that had once roused the French Court to laughter. If danger pressed so closely from all four quarters of the hill that escape seemed hopeless, his cheeriness infected those about him with a courage finer than their own.

Looking back on these days, Rupert knew that no ball at Holyrood here, no triumph-march to London, could have proved the Stuart as those Highland journeys had done. The Prince and he had learned the way of gain in loss, and with it the gaiety that amazes weaker men.

From Holyrood—the moon free of clouds and the grey walls finding faith again—a friendly message came to him. He caught the Stuart glamour up—the true, abiding glamour that does not yield to this world's limitations. What he had read in the library at Windyhough was now a triumph-song that he had found voice to sing.

He came to the house where Lady Royd was lodging, and knocked at the door ; and presently a trim Scots lassie opened to him, and saw him standing there in the moonlight of the street, his face haggard, his clothes, made up of borrowed odds

and ends, suggesting disrepute. She tried to close the door in his face; but Rupert had anticipated this, and pushed his way inside.

"Is Miss Demaine in the house?" he asked.

The maid recovered a little of her courage and her native tartness. "She is, forbye. Have you come buying old claes, or are you looking just for a chance to steal siller from the hoose?"

Rupert caught at the help she gave him. "There's the quick wit ye have, my lass," he said.

"Ah, now, you'll not be 'my lassing' me! I'll bid ye keep your station, as I keep mine."

"Well, then, my dear, go up to your mistress—the young mistress, I mean—and tell her there's a pedlar wanting her—a pedlar from the hills of Lancashire. Tell her he comes *buying and selling white favours*."

"So you're just one of us," said the maid, with surprising change of front. Then, her Scots caution getting the better of her again, "Your voice is o' the gentryfolk," she added, "but you're a queer body i' your claes. How should I know what you'd be stealing while I ran up to tell the mistress?"

Rupert, for answer, closed and barred the door behind him, and pointed up the stair. And then the maid, by the masterful, quiet way of him, knew that he came peddling honesty.

And by and by Nance came down, guessing who had come, because twice during the past month Rupert had sent word to her by messengers encountered haphazard in the Highland country.

At the stairfoot she halted, and never saw what clothes he wore. She looked only at his hard, tired face, at the straight carriage of him, as if he stood on parade. And, without her knowing it, or caring either way, a welcome, frank and luminous, brought a sudden beauty to the face that had been magical enough to him in the far-off Lancashire days.

The warmth of the lighted hall, the sense of courage and well-being that Nance had always brought him, were in sharp

contrast with the night and the ceaseless peril out of doors. He went to her, and took her two hands, and would not be done with reading what her eyes had to tell him. There could be no doubting what had come to them—the love deep, and to the death, and loyal; the love, not to be bought or counterfeited, that touches common things with radiance.

Rupert was giddy with it all. He had only to stoop and claim her, without question asked or answered. And yet he would not. He fought against this sudden warmth that tempted him to forget his friends—those driven comrades who trusted him to see them safely on board ship to the French coast. He put Nance away, as a courtier might who fears to hurt his queen, and only the strength of him redeemed his ludicrous and muddied clothes.

"You are not proved yet?" said Nance, with a gentle laugh of raillery and comradeship. "And yet the men who come in from the Highlands—the men we have helped to safety, Lady Royd and I—bring another tale of you."

Good women and bad are keen to play the temptress when they see a man hard set by the peril of his own wind-driven, eager heart; for Eve dies hard in any woman.

"There are others," he said stubbornly—"loyal men who trust me to bring them into Edinburgh."

"Scruples?" She mocked him daintily. "Women are not won by scruples."

He looked at her with the disarming, boyish smile that she remembered from old days—the smile which hid a purpose hard as steel. "Then women must be lost, Nance," he answered suavely.

Nance looked at him. He had changed since the days when her least whim had swayed him more than did the giving of her whole heart now. He was steady and unyielding, like a rock against which the winds beat idly. And suddenly a loneliness came over her, a wild impatience of men's outlook. She recalled the day at Windyhough, just after Sir Jasper had ridden out, when Lady Royd had complained that honour was

more to a man than wife-love and his home's need of him. She remembered how, with a girl's untutored zeal, she had blamed Sir Jasper's wife because she could not realise the high romance of it. But now she understood.

"You rode out to prove yourself—for my sake and the Cause?" she said, with cool disdain.

"Yes, Nance."

"And you found—adventure. And your name is one to kindle hero-worship wherever loyal fugitives meet and speak of you. Oh, you shall have your due, Rupert! But in the doing of it the hard endeavour grew dear in itself—dearer than life, than—than little Nance Demaine, for whose sake you got to horse."

He flushed, knowing she spoke truth; and he stood at bay, ashamed of what should have been his pride. And then he returned, by habit, to the mood taught him by night-riding and the over-arching skies.

"Men love that way," he said bluntly.

Nance was twisting and untwisting the kerchief she held between her capable, strong fingers. She had not guessed till now the bitterness of tongue she could command.

"Oh, yes, my dear; we learned it together, did we not, in the library at Windyhough? There was a book of Richard Lovelace, his poems, and he was very graceful when he bade his wife farewell:

"I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more."

And honour took him to the open—to the rousing hunt—and his wife stayed on at home."

Rupert, unskilled in the lore that has tempted many fools afield, was dismayed by the attack. In his simplicity, he had looked for praise when he put temptation by him and asked only for a God-speed till the road of his plain duty was ended and he was free to claim her. He did not know—how should

he?—that women love best the gifts that never reach their feet.

"Nance," he said, "what ails you women? It was so at Windyhough, when the Loyal Meet rode out, and mother cried as if they'd found dishonour."

"What ails us?" She was not bitter now, but helpless, and her eyes were thick with tears. "Our birthright ails us. We're like children crying in the dark, and the night's lonely round us, and we are far from home. And the strong hand comes to us, and we cast it off, because we need its strength. And then we go crying in the dark again, and wonder why God made us so. And—and that is what ails us," she added, with a flash of sharp, defiant humour. And her eyes clouded suddenly. "I—I have lost a father to the Cause. It is hard to be brave these days, Rupert."

So then he looked neither before nor after, but took the straight way and the ready with her. And by and by the yapping of a pampered dog broke the silence of the house, and Lady Royd's voice sounded, low and querulous, from the stairhead.

"Nance, where are you? Poor Fido is not well—not well at all."

For the moment Rupert believed that he was home at Windyhough again. Fido's bark, the need paramount that his wants must be served at once, were like old days.

"They have not told her you are here," said Nance. "I'll run up and break the news."

When Rupert came into the parlour up above, Fido, true to old habit, ran yapping round him, and bit his riding-boots; for he hated men, because they knew him for a lap-dog. And, after the din had died down a little, Rupert stepped to his mother's side, and stooped to kiss her hand. And she looked him up and down; and the motherhood in her was keen and proved, but she could forego old habits as little as could Fido.

"Dear heart, what clothes to wear in Edinburgh!" she

cried. "It's as well you're not known in the town for a Royd."

"Yes, it's as well, mother," he answered dryly.

"You are thinner than you were, Rupert, and straighter in the shoulders, and—and many things have happened to you."

"I rode out for happenings."

"Oh, yes, you're so like your father; and they tell me what you've done—"

"And you, mother?" he broke in. "There are gentlemen of the Prince's who would not be safe in France to-day without your help—yours and Nance's."

"There, my dear, you fatigue me! I have done so little. It grew dull in Lancashire, waiting for news of your father. It was all so simple—Fido, my sweet, you will not bark at Rupert; he's a friend—and then I had my own fortune, you see, apart from Windyhough, and one must spend money somehow, must one not? So I began playing at ships—just like a child gone back to the nursery—and Nance here was as big a baby as myself."

If Rupert had changed, so had Lady Royd. There was no faded prettiness now about her face, but there were lines of beauty. Behind her light handling of these past weeks in Edinburgh there was a record of sleepless nights, of harassed days, of discomfort and peril undertaken willingly. She had spent money in providing means of passage for the exiles; but she had spent herself, too, in ceaseless stratagem and watchfulness.

"It was all so piquant," she went on, in the old, indolent tone. "So many gallant men supped here, Rupert, before taking boat. And they brought each his tale of battle in the hills. And their disguises were so odd, almost as odd as the clothes you're wearing now, my dear."

"The Prince's were little better when I last saw him," laughed the other.

"Ah, now, you will sit down beside me—here—and Nance shall sit there, like Desdemona listening to Othello. And you

will tell us of the Prince. You were very near his person during the Highland flight, they tell me."

So Rupert, because he had that one night's leisure at command, forgot his own perils in telling of the Stuart's. He had no art of narrative, except the soldier's plain telling of what chanced; but, step by step, he led them through the broken days, talking seldom of himself, but constantly of Prince Charles Edward, until the bare record of their wanderings became a lively and abiding tribute to the Stuart's strength. And when he had done Lady Royd was crying softly, while Nance felt a strange loyalty play round her like a windy night about the moors of Lancashire.

"He was like that!" said Lady Royd at last. "He was like that, while, God forgive me! I was picturing him all the while in love-locks, dancing a minuet."

"The sword-dance is better known, mother, where we have been," said Rupert, with pleasant irony.

Late that night, when Nance had left them together for a while, Lady Royd came and laid a hand on her son's arm. "You have done enough," she said. "Oh, I know! There are still many broken men, waiting for a passage. They must take their chance, Rupert. Your father was not ashamed to cross to France, with my help."

He put an arm about her, for he had learned tenderness in a hard school. "Mother, he was not ashamed, because his work was done here. Mine is not. What Oliphant knew of the byways—what the last months have taught me—I cannot take the knowledge with me, to rust in France. I am pledged to these gentry of the Prince's."

"Then I shall go on playing at ships here—till you come to ask a passage."

And her face was resolute and proud, as if this son of hers had returned a conqueror.

The next day, after nightfall, Rupert went out again, through Edinburgh's moonlit streets, toward the northern hills and the perils that he coveted. And just before he went Nance De-

maine came down into the hall, and stood beside him in the gusty candle-light. Old days and new were tangled in her mind ; she was aware only of a great heart-sickness and trouble, so that she did not halt to ask herself if it were maidenly or prudent to come down for another long goodbye. In some muddled way she remembered Will Underwood, his debonair and easy claiming of her kerchief, remembered their meeting on the heath, and afterwards Will lying in the courtyard at Windyhough, his body tortured by a gaping wound. She had given him her kerchief then for pity, and now Rupert was going out without claiming the token she would have given him for love. Rupert seemed oddly forgetful of little things these days, she told herself.

"Would you not wear my favour—for luck?" she asked.

And then, giving no time for answer, she began feverishly to knot her kerchief into a white cockade ; and then again she thought better of it, and untied the blue scarf that was her girdle, and snipped a piece from it with the scissors hanging at her waist.

"It is the dear Madonna's colour ; and I think you ride for faith," she said, with a child's simplicity. "Rupert, I do not know how or why, but I let you go very willingly. I did not understand until to-night how—how big a man's love for a woman is."

They were not easy days that followed. Rupert was among the Midlothian hills—farther afield sometimes—snatching sleep and food when he could, shepherding the broken gentry, leaving nothing undone that a man's strength and single purpose could accomplish. And in the house near Holyrood Lady Royd and Nance were helping the fugitives he sped forward to get on shipboard. And ever, as they plied this trade of separation under peril, a knowledge and a trust went up and down between Edinburgh and the northern hills—a trust that did not go on horseback or on foot, because its wings were stretched for flight above ground.

And near the year's end, with an easterly haar that made the

town desolate, the last fugitive came to the house that lay near Holyrood. He should have been spent with well-doing, footsore and saddle-sore with journeyings among the hills; but, instead he carried himself as if he had found abundant health.

"I've done my work, mother," he said, stooping to Lady Royd's hand.

"It's as well, my dear. Nance and I were nearly tired of playing at ships."

That night they got aboard at Leith; and, after a contrary and troubled crossing, they came into harbour on the French coast. The night was soft and pleasant, like the promises that France had made the Stuart—the promises made and broken a score of times before ever the Prince landed in the Western Isles. A full moon was making a track of amethyst and gold across the gentle seas, and a faint, salt breeze was blowing.

"Are you content?" asked Nance.

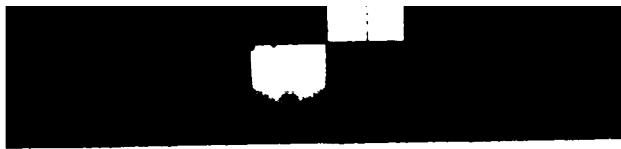
"Content? My dear, what else?"

And yet she saw his glance rove out across the moonlit track that led to England; and a jealous trouble, light as the sea-breeze, crossed her happiness; and she conquered it, because she had learned in Edinburgh the way of a man's heart.

"You're dreaming of the next Rising?" she said, with a low, tranquil laugh. "I shall forgive you—so long as you let me share your dreams."

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